

Johns Hopkins University

**HOW TO GROW RESEARCH CAPABILITIES THROUGH
ASSESSMENT FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING**

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Abstract

The practice of program assessment provides the unique opportunity for a unit to undertake a structured review and analysis of its mission and services to provide University administrators robust data on which to base strategic decisions. It was with that goal in mind that this Capstone Project was designed to conduct a self-study of the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs (ORSP) at California State University, Stanislaus (Stanislaus State). Over the previous ten years, the ORSP self-assessment measures had been limited to annual reporting on the productivity of the office and highlighting the quantitative metrics of the number of proposals submitted and dollars awarded to the University. With a commitment to conduct a holistic review of ORSP based on the unique needs of research at Stanislaus State, a review of the metrics and best practices used to assess sponsored program offices was conducted. Based on this research and a formal retreat held by the staff of ORSP a questionnaire was designed to assess the level of support provided by ORSP and the capacity available to increase research capabilities on campus. The questionnaire was distributed to Stanislaus State faculty, staff, and administrators and the results of the questionnaire led to six recommendations ORSP will incorporate into a revised strategic plan. The recommendations included increasing activities to support grant prospecting, grant writing, and budget development skills. The results also highlighted the opportunity to increase awareness on campus of the activities, support, and services provided by ORSP.

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Glossary

Program Assessment. An ongoing process undertaken by academic programs that evaluates student learning outcomes allowing for institutional decision making, strategic planning and budgetary recommendations for the program.¹

Support Unit Review. A comprehensive and periodic review that provides a mechanism for non-academic units to undergo an assessment that provides insight into the effectiveness of the unit, a review of the resources being used, and the units support of the university mission.²

¹ "Office of Assessment." California State University, Stanislaus. Accessed on March 10, 2019. <http://www.csustan.edu/office-assessment>.

² "Support Unit Review." California State University, Stanislaus. Accessed on March 10, 2019. <http://www.csustan.edu/spemi/support-unit-review-sur>.

Abbreviations

CEGE	Center for Excellence in Graduate Education
IACUC	Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee
IRB	Institutional Review Board
NCURA	National Council of University Research Administrators
ORSP	Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
PEER	PI/PD Expertise, Engagement, and Resource
PUI	Primarily Undergraduate University
RSCA	Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activity
RSCA-PC	Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activity Policy Committee
SERSCA	Student Engagement in Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activity
SPEMI	Strategic Planning, Enrollment Management, and Innovation
SUR	Support Unit Review
UAS	Unmanned Aircraft Systems
UAV	Unmanned Aerial Vehicles
WASC	Western Association of Schools and Colleges

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Program assessment and evaluation have become an essential part of academic life on university campuses. Conducting structured, routine departmental evaluations provides academic leadership hard data on which to base strategic decisions. While these evaluations are standard for academic departments, they have not been applied as uniformly to the academic support units at universities and many such units are not required to perform a structured program assessment. This has been the case historically at California State University, Stanislaus (Stanislaus State). There is, however, a movement on campus to extend assessment practices and strategic planning to all campus units so that they can benefit from resource allocations that are made based on these robust datasets. The goal of this project, therefore, is to design and conduct a support unit assessment that will be used to create a new strategic plan for the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs (ORSP) using a set of metrics and assessment measures that are appropriate for the size and scope of the University.

1.2. Statement of Problem

Program assessment and evaluation has woven its way into academic life. It has become an invaluable tool used by academic departments to ensure they are meeting the goals of the department, college, and institution as a whole and serving their students effectively. These assessments also provide data for review during the University's accreditation process. In the past, some non-academic support units have undergone a

program evaluation, however, these evaluations were not carried out in any systematic or structured way. With a recent change in the University's leadership, there has been a renewed call for all units to undergo a formal program assessment.

Stanislaus State is a small, primarily undergraduate institution (PUI) with a very strong focus on teaching. Given the teaching demands placed on the faculty, it is not surprising that Stanislaus State has a small portfolio of extramural sponsored programs. In keeping with the University's mission, many of the largest extramural awards are federal training and capacity-building grants, such as the Federal TRIO Programs, Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI) awards, and National Science Foundation Robert Noyce Teacher Scholarship Program, with proposals of this type being written by teams of administrators, staff, and faculty. While the current grant portfolio at Stanislaus State is small, there is a desire for ORSP to facilitate an increase in extramural funding. Therefore, the call for support-unit assessment presents a unique opportunity for ORSP to gather the data needed to identify and implement interventions that will grow the sponsored programs portfolio. To that end, this Capstone Project seeks to identify and implement appropriate measures for evaluating a small sponsored programs office at a primarily undergraduate, teaching-focused institution.

1.3. Project Question

Sponsored programs offices often report on the number of proposals funded, direct and indirect dollars received, and number of proposals submitted and use these figures as a measure of their effectiveness. This has historically been the case the Stanislaus State with success being measured by total dollars received. While these statistics paint a partial

picture of the activity and success of the office, they do not necessarily give a full representation of the offices' impact on the institution. Therefore, the main question for this Capstone Project is:

Can an assessment that goes beyond the numbers of grants submitted/funded and dollars awarded be developed and implemented to capture how ORSP at Stanislaus State meets the unique needs of faculty investigators and supports the University's mission.

1.4. Project Objectives

The project objectives were designed to support the development of a holistic assessment process that incorporates the unique needs, mission, vision, and values of ORSP at Stanislaus State. The project was guided by the Stanislaus State Strategic Plan 2017-2025 and specifically speaks to Goal 2: "provide transformational learning experiences driven by faculty success."³ Implementation of that goal calls for an increase in practices that support excellence in research, scholarship, and creative activity (RSCA) among students and faculty. ORSP recognizes that the support of faculty and students in their RSCA requires the implementation of a diverse set of services and programming in order to meet those goals. This Capstone Project was designed to develop and implement an assessment plan that will capture that data with the following five objectives:

1. Perform background research to establish the disciplinary and local context of the support unit assessment

³ "Strategic Planning." Office of the President. Accessed March 16, 2019. <http://www.csustan.edu/strategic-planning>

2. Identify and formulate appropriate direct and indirect assessment measures
3. Implement the identified measures
4. Complete a self-study that incorporates the results of the measures
5. Disseminate the findings that will inform the development of a final strategic plan for ORSP.

1.5. Significance

As mentioned earlier, Stanislaus State is a PUI whose focus is on student learning and excellence in faculty teaching and scholarly activities. Student success and engagement is a cornerstone of every academic program and support unit, and ORSP is no different. The majority of external grants and contracts sought focus on student success, both at the institutional and individual faculty research level. Student submissions to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) make up 65% of the total protocols reviewed, and ORSP administers an internal grant program that focuses solely on student engagement in research, scholarship, and creative activity (SERSCA). Given the PUI focus on student success and faculty teaching, it is understandable that a majority of ORSP staff time and resources go to support those activities. However, ORSP must also support and promote individual faculty in their pursuit of external grant support. Over the years, as changes occurred in senior administration and in the economic climate, the size and institutional support for ORSP has fluctuated. Ten years ago, ORSP staffing levels were at a high of six full-time employees before declining to a low of two full-time employees. The current staffing level of three full-time employees has held steady for the past several years.

Stanislaus State will benefit from ORSP undergoing a detailed, data-driven discussion of assessment practices, application of direct and indirect measures, effective implementation of a meaningful self-study, and the development of a draft strategic plan. As the completion of support unit reviews become a reality at Stanislaus State, approaching the review through an informed, fully engaged, holistic, needs-assessment focus allows the office to highlight its strengths, identify areas to be improved, and provide University administrators data on which to base strategic decisions related to supporting research on campus. The support unit review will underscore the ways in which ORSP advances the mission of the University and serves a wide variety of stakeholders across campus.

1.6. Exclusions and Limitations

This project focuses on the assessment of the pre-award functions of ORSP, specifically the grant development, faculty outreach, and grant submission activities. While ORSP manages a multitude of other compliance and student-centered programming, assessment of those activities is not included in this Capstone Project.

An exclusion would apply to assessing the post-award functions related to sponsored programs. Stanislaus State's pre- and post-award grant functions are divided into two separate offices, with the pre-award office reporting directly to the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs and the post-award office reporting directly to the Assistant Vice President of Business and Finance. While these two central teams work in tandem to manage all of the sponsored programs activity on campus, the divided reporting structure does not allow for a combined assessment of both the pre- and post-award offices.

Chapter 2. Overview of Literature Review

2.1. Overview of Literature Review

This literature review seeks to understand why program assessment is important, how it is conducted in research support units, and what tools and metrics have been used successfully on other campuses so that they can inform the design of the author's project of assessing ORSP at Stanislaus State. The results of the review will shape a holistic assessment plan whose findings will contribute to developing a draft strategic plan for the office.

2.1.1. Need for Assessment

Institutions of higher education undergo a routine process of program assessment as part of their accreditation process. Stanislaus State's accrediting body is the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC). The WASC accreditation cycle includes assessment, planning, implementing, and reassessment.⁴ Through this call for standardized assessment, institutions have become comfortable with performing academic program assessment. Stanislaus State has an Office of Assessment⁵ that coordinates the robust seven-year cycle academic program review that is required of every academic department and program. These program reviews allow for strategic planning, afford opportunities to evaluate the quality of the academic offerings, and provide data and context for University administrators to make planning and budgetary decisions related to the programs.⁶ The required accreditation process and standardized process of the academic program review

⁴ "ACS WASC Mission." Accrediting Commission for Schools Western Association of Schools and Colleges. Accessed March 1, 2019. <https://www.acswasc.org/wasc/acs-wasc-mission/>.

⁵ "Academic Program Review." Office of Assessment. Accessed March 3, 2019. <https://www.csustan.edu/office-assessment/academic-program-review>.

⁶ Ibid.

force the academic departments to continuously assess and improve the quality of their programs, with an emphasis on student success.

Non-academic units also strive for improvement in their programming and services to the University community; however, at Stanislaus State there has not been the same level of attention and rigor placed on those reviews compared to the academic program reviews on campus. This is a common trend in support units, with institutions claiming that, while there is a structure for non-academic assessments, they are “haphazard in their assessment efforts”.⁷ Smith, Szelest, and Downey note that transitioning assessment from academic programs to non-academic departments is a relatively new concept that in 2004 had not gained much traction in either academic or student affairs.⁸ The same has been true for research support offices. In a 1992 article, Lowry and Walker report that, through an informal survey, they found that 63% of research support offices do not have a formal process of assessment.⁹ They further assert that, when assessment is performed, it mirrors the academic department process and is often performed by faculty researchers.¹⁰ While this assessment structure may lead to valuable insights, it is also limited to one viewpoint, does not encourage ownership of the process by the support unit staff, and is not purposely designed to provide assessment that can be used to support continuous improvement within the unit.

⁷ Tricia A. Kujawa and Lesley Frederick. “Nonacademic Assessment: Finding the “Start Line.” *Assessment* (2016): 1 <https://cop.hlcommission.org/Assessment/kujawa2016/Print.html>

⁸ Joshua S. Smith, Bruce P. Szelest, and John P. Downey, “Implementing Outcomes Assessment in an Academic Affairs Support Unit.” *Research in Higher Education* 45, no. 4 (June 2004): 406-407.

⁹ Peggy S. Lowry, and Celia S. Walker, “The Need to Evaluate Research Support Offices in Institutions of Higher Education.” *SRA Journal* 23, 4 (spring 1992): 2.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

2.2. Details of Literature Review

Given the increasing reliance on assessment in academic divisions, it is clear that research support offices can benefit from participating in a routine, structured assessment. It is helpful to review what types of assessment have been implemented in the past and what options are currently being pursued by research offices that are engaging in active assessment. The most common type of assessment process is the self-evaluation; however, this indirect assessment can be augmented by additional institutional internal review consisting of faculty review panels and expanded further to include outside review by research administration professionals.¹¹ It is also common for assessments to include both quantitative (number of proposals submitted and awarded) and qualitative (faculty satisfaction) metrics.¹²

2.2.1. Quantitative Metrics

In a survey conducted by Davis-Hamilton, research administrators were asked about the methods used to evaluate their sponsored programs offices. 75% of the respondents reported they most often use the number of proposals processed, number of awards, and number of active sponsored program accounts to evaluate their service.¹³ Other metrics commonly cited in the survey included the change in number of proposals submitted year-to-year, number of first time submissions by faculty, and the time spent processing

¹¹ Peggy S. Lowry, and Celia S. Walker, "The Need to Evaluate Research Support Offices in Institutions of Higher Education." *SRA Journal* 23, 4 (spring 1992): 2.

¹² Sarah Marina, Zoya Davis-Hamilton, and Kara E. Charmanski, "Evaluating Research Administration: Methods and Utility." *The Journal of Research Administration* 46, no 2 (fall 2015): 95.

¹³ Zoya Davis-Hamilton, "Do We Measure Up? How Research Administration Offices Evaluate Their Services." *SRA International Catalyst*, Accessed March 16, 2019, <https://www.srainternational.org/publications/catalyst/201712/do-we-measure-how-research-administration-offices-evaluate-their>.

proposals.¹⁴ This mirrors the findings by Marina, Davis-Hamilton, and Charmanski that institutions most often track expenditure data, indirect cost recovery rates, the number of routed forms, and the number of awards processed.¹⁵

Though widely used due to their simplicity to measure and the ease of data collection, quantitative metrics may not provide a complete picture of the activities and productivity of a research office.¹⁶ External forces beyond the control of the research office (i.e. priorities of funding agencies) may affect the validity of certain types of quantitative measures, such as dollars awarded.^{17,18} Hanson argues that simply measuring dollars “does not directly measure the extent and the vitality of grant activity.”¹⁹ Additional recommended measures include tracking the number of faculty submitting proposals, a review of the types of agencies (i.e. federal, state, local, non-profit) to which the institution submits proposals, and a measure of the institutional resources dedicated to seeking external grant support.²⁰ A common metric used in the assessment of research offices is that of benchmarking. Benchmarking is a process in which the functions of one institution are directly compared to those of another, similar institution.²¹ As with other metrics,

¹⁴ Zoya Davis-Hamilton, “Do We Measure Up? How Research Administration Offices Evaluate Their Services.” SRA International Catalyst, Accessed March 16, 2019, <https://www.srainternational.org/publications/catalyst/201712/do-we-measure-how-research-administration-offices-evaluate-their>.

¹⁵ Sarah Marina, Zoya Davis-Hamilton, and Kara E. Charmanski, “Evaluating Research Administration: Methods and Utility.” *The Journal of Research Administration* 46, no 2 (fall 2015): 96.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 96-97.

¹⁸ Stephen Hansen, “Evaluating Sponsored Programs at Predominantly Undergraduate Institutions.” *Journal of the Society of Research Administrators* 21, no 1 (summer 1989): 27.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., 28.

²¹ Paul G. Waugaman, Willaim S. Kirby, and Louis G. Tornatzky. “Performance Measurement,” in *Research Administration and Management*, ed. Elliott C. Kulakowski and Lynne U. Chronister, (Sudbury: Jones and Bartlett Publishers, .2006), 137-138.

benchmarking can provide insights into the effectiveness of a research office, but it can also be limited by an inability to identify truly comparable institutions.²²

2.2.2. Qualitative Metrics

Customer service is a key component of sponsored programs offices. Therefore, it is easy to understand the benefit of including customer satisfaction as a key assessment measure.²³ While satisfaction surveys give important direct feedback on the services provided, the results are limited in that feedback is received only from those who respond to the survey. Despite low response rates, valuable information can be collected.²⁴ Office satisfaction surveys tend to evaluate on items such as communication skills, knowledge and expertise, attention to detail, and staff responsiveness.²⁵ Surveys are also used to evaluate faculty's reliance on research administrators and the perceptions of the faculty's own grantsmanship abilities.²⁶

2.2.3. Best Practices

From a review of the literature, it is clear to the author that there is no one metric or set of metrics that can be uniformly applied to evaluate a sponsored programs office. However, there are best practices that can be followed. A good example of a comprehensive assessment is the Peer Review Program offered through the National

²² Paul G. Waugaman, Willaim S. Kirby, and Louis G. Tornatzky. "Performance Measurement," in *Research Administration and Management*, ed. Elliott C. Kulakowski and Lynne U. Chronister, (Sudbury: Jones and Bartlett Publishers, .2006), 143.

²³ Zoya Davis-Hamilton, "Do We Measure Up? How Research Administration Offices Evaluate Their Services." SRA International Catalyst, Accessed March 16, 2019, <https://www.srainternational.org/publications/catalyst/201712/do-we-measure-how-research-administration-offices-evaluate-their>.

²⁴ Sarah Marina, Zoya Davis-Hamilton, and Kara E. Charmanski, "Evaluating Research Administration: Methods and Utility." *The Journal of Research Administration* 46, no 2 (fall 2015): 99.

²⁵ Ibid., 102.

²⁶ Ibid., 103-4.

Council of University Research Administrators (NCURA).²⁷ The NCURA Peer Review applies standards and reviews programs on several different levels of office functioning, including institutional planning and investment, research enterprise components and structure, communication and outreach, policy and risk assessment, faculty engagement and burden, research administration systems and data management, institutional partnerships, development operations, and sponsored programs operations.²⁸

While other assessments focus solely on the staffing requirements of the sponsored programs offices, these assessments occur at institutions that have robust external funding levels that necessitate a more complex organizational structure. These reviews tend to rely on metrics that include the level of indirect cost recovery to support the infrastructure, the level of customer service provided, and the productivity of the office related to proposals submitted, funded, and dollars spent.²⁹

2.3. Applicability of Literature Review

Assessment of research support offices at PUIs can look very different from assessments conducted at larger, research-focused institutions. While the quantitative metrics discussed above may provide an accurate picture for a sponsored programs office at a research-intensive institution, the number of proposals funded and research dollars

²⁷ "Peer Review Programs." National Council of University Research Administrators. Accessed on March 16, 2019.

<https://www.ncura.edu/InstitutionalPrograms/PeerReviewPrograms/SponsoredProgramsReview.aspx>.

²⁸ "Central Sponsored Programs Review." National Council of University Research Administrators. Accessed on March 16, 2019.

<https://www.ncura.edu/InstitutionalPrograms/PeerReviewPrograms/SponsoredProgramsReview.aspx>.

²⁹ "Review of the Research Administration Function at the University of Southern Maine." University of Southern Maine. Accessed February 7, 2019,

<https://usm.maine.edu/sites/default/files/provost/USM%20final%20research%20administration%20review.dOCX>

awarded may not have the same importance at a PUI. Being a centralized office, ORSP is not only tasked with preparing, submitting, and negotiating sponsored awards, it is also responsible for the following activities:

- Managing the IRB and IACUC proposal submission and review process
- Supporting the faculty governance Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activity Policy Committee (RSCA-PC)
- Co-directing (along with the Center for Excellence in Graduate Education; CEGE) the Student Engagement in Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activity (SERSCA) program that provides assistantships, mini-grants, and travel grants to students engaged in mentored research
- Managing export control compliance and intellectual property disclosures

These functions all occur on top of the expectation that the office engage, support, and build capacity for faculty to pursue external funding for their research, scholarship, and creative activity (RSCA). With such a diverse portfolio of activities, an assessment plan limited to proposals submitted or dollars awarded is completely inadequate. Such a simplistic approach fails to capture a large percentage of the office's activities and would exclude large numbers of important stakeholders, including undergraduate and graduate students. Given the potential impact the findings of this assessment project will have on the office, it is critical that the assessment plan incorporate best practices and appropriate metrics to capture the full range of ORSP's work, which goes well beyond the dollars requested and received from external agencies.

Chapter 3. Needs Assessment

3.1. Needs Assessment

Stanislaus State has an exhaustive program for assessment of academic departments and programs, which occurs on a 7-year cycle and is mandated by the Office of the Chancellor (which oversees the 23 campuses that form the California State University System) and regional accrediting bodies, including Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC). However, for at least the past 10 years, academic support units have not been required to perform any standardized form of unit review. The mission of ORSP is to be “a ready resource for the campus community, providing support for success in research and sponsored projects.”³⁰ The mission calls for ORSP to “provide support for success,” but without a structured way to collect data that can be used to measure and interpret that success, there is insufficient meaning in that mission.

Being a support unit with a direct report line to the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, ORSP annually reports data on the office’s activities to the administration. To date, the data reported have revolved around the level of grant activity processed by the office including numbers of dollars awarded, proposals submitted, and compliance protocols processed. The unit has not attempted to capture any qualitative data related to the functioning of the unit or expand the measures used to formally assess services and outcomes which would inform possible opportunities to support the growth of sponsored programs on campus.

³⁰ “Office of Research and Sponsored Programs.” California State University Stanislaus. Accessed February 7, 2019. <http://www.csustan.edu/office-research-sponsored-programs>.

3.2. Metrics

While it has not been practiced to date at Stanislaus State, assessment and evaluation of sponsored programs offices is not a new concept in the field of research administration. Robust assessments that include direct and indirect measures of support unit success are standard practice at many different institutions. Informative examples include the University of Southern Maine,³¹ the University at Buffalo,³² and Wayne State University.³³

While it might be tempting to find a published assessment plan developed and used at another university and simply implement that plan at Stanislaus State, all institutions vary in their size, scope and mission as they relate to research and authentic assessment that can productively inform strategic planning must measure outcomes meaningful to the institution. Haines recommends using metrics that will highlight an office's greatest opportunities and suggests those will include "operational performance, compliance management, financial/cost management, and/or customer perception."³⁴

In choosing the metrics for the ORSP assessment, the author reviewed the best practices used within the NCURA Peer Review process. While the quantitative metrics of planning and investment, research administration systems and data management, and operations are important, they may not hold much meaning at Stanislaus State given the

³¹ "Review of the Research Administration Function at the University of Southern Maine." University of Southern Maine. Accessed February 7, 2019, <https://usm.maine.edu/sites/default/files/provost/USM%20final%20research%20administration%20review.docx>

³² "Sponsored Programs Initiative." University at Buffalo. Accessed February 7, 2019. http://www.buffalo.edu/ub2020/archives/strategic-initiative-archive/transforming_operations/sponsored_programs.html

³³ "An Assessment of the Research Administration Infrastructure At Wayne State University." Wayne State University. Accessed February 7, 2019. https://research.wayne.edu/about/pdf/res_admin_infrastructure_assessment_final_report_for_wsuoctober_72009-1.pdf

³⁴ Nathan Haines. "Metrics for Research Administration Offices (Part 2)." *Journal of Clinical Research Best Practices* 8, no 7 (July 2012):1.

current low level of sponsored research activity on campus. Instead, a subset of the NCURA standards were chosen, including the qualitative metrics of faculty engagement and communications and outreach. These metrics hold more promise for truly assessing the success of the office. In doing so, the author is following advice found in Marina, Davis-Hamilton, and Charmanski's³⁵ article to tailor an assessment plan to the resources available to ensure its successful completion. These include the institutional investment in the plan and the staff and faculty time available to complete the assessments. Keeping this in mind, the author chose to focus the assessment on (1) customer service provided to the ORSP stakeholders and (2) the support activities provided to faculty and staff to build capacity to seek and be successful in receiving extramural funding.

3.3. Sources

As Stanislaus State is primarily an undergraduate institution with a very strong emphasis on teaching excellence and a faculty workload that leaves little time to focus on research, scholarship, or creative activity, it is not surprising that the external research portfolio managed by ORSP is relatively small. The level of research activity is mirrored in the ORSP staffing levels, which consist of three full-time employees (the Director, one Grant and Contract Specialist, and one Research Coordinator). Given the small size of the office, ORSP staff members played a key role in the review of the needs assessment and the development of the assessment plan. A staff retreat was held to review the strategic plan

³⁵ Sarah Marina, Zoya Davis-Hamilton, Kara E. Charmanski, "Evaluating Research Administration: Methods and Utility." *Journal of Research Administration* 46, no 2 (Fall 2015): 98.
http://download.srainternational.org/journal/archive/JRA%20V46n2_Fall2015-pages-FINALReduc.pdf

that currently guides ORSP's activities. A faculty member with expertise in group facilitation and academic program assessment was invited to lead the retreat, frame the discussions, and keep the participants on task. Robust discussions were held regarding the appropriateness of the current strategic plan, which focused on reporting numbers and goals to increase those numbers. The main themes identified during the retreat centered around ORSP providing service to the campus community and the desire to build capacity for the campus faculty in the areas of external sponsored research and supporting compliance best practices and student engagement in RSCA. This raised questions regarding the utility of the current strategic plan as it relates to the actual functioning of the office. The current strategic plan and assessment structure do not allow ORSP to be assessed on the functions deemed to be most important by the office's staff.

3.4. Committees

Following the staff retreat, the author convened a committee of faculty and staff currently serving as Principal Investigators and Program Directors on active externally funded grants. The committee also included the author (the Director of ORSP) and the Manager of Post-Award Grant Accounting. The committee was briefed on the work performed at the ORSP staff retreat and the desire to create and implement an assessment using metrics and measures that are useful in assessing the current functioning of the office, which can then be used to develop a new draft strategic plan for ORSP.

Chapter 4. Project Description

4.1. Project Elements

As discussed above, with a recent change in University administration, there is a renewed focus on support unit assessment with the goal of reviewing each support unit on a five-year cycle. As the author's department was scheduled for its support unit review (SUR) during the 2018-2019 academic year, the review provided the perfect opportunity to conduct this Capstone Project. This Capstone Project builds on the University's SUR to perform an in-depth, meaningful assessment of the work performed by ORSP.

The University's required SUR consists of a self-study that focuses on how the unit works within in the larger University setting. While it does include a section on the assessment and effectiveness of the unit, the majority of the report solicits information on how the unit functions, its interactions with other units on campus, the resources available to the unit, and the management structure of the unit. While reporting on these categories will provide University administrators a snapshot of how well the unit is functioning, the mandated self-study takes a one-size-fits-all approach that fails to capture the full range of functions ORSP completes to meet its mission and goals.

In preparing to undertake the SUR, the author found it difficult to address all of the functions performed by ORSP within the confines of the SUR categories. As is often the case at PUIs, ORSP is a one-stop shop that not only manages all of the usual pre-award grant and contract activities, but is also responsible for a host of compliance and student research activities. Yet, according to the strategic plan for ORSP, the main goal of the unit is to

support the submission and receipt of external grant funding. It is with that understanding that the author set out to complete an assessment of the unit with the goal of providing clarity on the day-to-day work ORSP performs and to assess the extent to which the office is meeting its primary mission and goals – to support faculty in their pursuit of external funding for their research, scholarship, and creative activities.

Chapter 5. Methodology

5.1. Methodology Overview

This chapter describes the methodologies used to perform the unit assessment. It describes the process of identifying the functions critical to ORSP and the design and distribution of the assessment tool.

5.2. Project Design and Discussion

The Stanislaus State ORSP consists of three full-time employees: the Director, a Grant and Contract Specialist, and a Research Coordinator. All of the University's pre-award grant and contract activities are centralized in this three-person office and all staff members work collaboratively to advance the ORSP mission and goals. Therefore, the starting point for this project was to hold a staff retreat. The retreat was held in the conference room located within the ORSP office suite and the office was closed during those hours to ensure that all staff could participate without interruption throughout the entire retreat. A current faculty member served as the facilitator of the half-day retreat. The faculty facilitator brought an expertise in leading brainstorming sessions and, as a currently funded PI, also brought a familiarity with the internal workings of ORSP.

The retreat began with an overview of the SUR process and a review of ORSP's current Strategic Plan (Appendix 1). Time was spent reviewing the current mission statement and evaluating the office's adherence to the five goals enumerated in the Strategic Plan:

Goal 1: Increase the University's grant and contract success in at least one of the following ways:

- a. increase the number of grant and contract proposal submissions;
- b. increase the number of dollars requested;
- c. increase the rate of meritorious grant and contract proposals; and
- d. increase the number of dollars awarded.

Goal 2: Increase the campus community's compliance with policies governing research (e.g., use of human subjects and animals, conflict of interest, intellectual property rights, and export controls).

Goal 3: Improve the experience of principal investigators and project directors in grants and contracts with seamless transition from pre-award to post-award.

Goal 4: Increase support and opportunities for faculty-led student engagement in research, scholarship, and creative activities (SERSCA).

Goal 5: Increase participation in and contribution to the professional fields related to the mission of the unit.

To this end, working individually, each staff member generated a list of their daily activities. Staff members then came together to share and review those activities. During this collaborative review, it became clear that most ORSP activities coalesce around three organizational categories or themes: (1) grant and contract support, (2) compliance, and (3) student programming. The majority of the activities were centered around supporting the wide range of University stakeholders ORSP serves, including one-on-one meetings with faculty, staff, students, and administrators, answering questions, delivering workshops, developing support materials, and managing internal grant awards. The staff also identified the importance and time spent building relationships with external agencies, but gave even

greater importance to (and reported spending more time on) building strong working relationships with all of the internal campus offices with whom ORSP interacts.

The facilitator then asked the group to indicate how these activities and themes relate to the ORSP mission and goals. Group members observed that the three themes map directly onto three of the five goals (Goal 1: Increasing grant and contract activity, Goal 2: Ensuring compliance, and Goal 4: Increasing student engagement with RSCA), while not speaking directly to the two remaining goals (Goal 3: Facilitating a seamless transition between pre-award and post-award activities for PIs and Goal 5: Supporting professional development for ORSP staff). Participants pointed out that the three themes around which ORSP work coalesces are the three elements featured in the mission statement summarized on the ORSP webpage.³⁶

As it is the top priority for ORSP, the group decided to focus assessment activities on Goal 1: Increasing grant and contract activity. Interestingly, the actual processes followed (i.e. the internal routing procedures, the lack of electronic research administration software solutions) were not of great concern to the staff, nor did they perceive those as a barrier to meeting the strategic plan goals. Instead, the staff clearly identified that the time spent on their daily activities centered around being a ready resource to the campus community and the need to build capacity to support the three themes, with an emphasis on the first theme. Through further conversation about what “capacity building” meant, the group acknowledged that both in the compliance and student programming activities more time

³⁶ “Welcome.” Office of Research and Sponsored Programs. Accessed March 17, 2019. <https://www.csustan.edu/office-research-sponsored-programs>

was spent on support, rather than capacity building. The capacity building activities, therefore, were clearly focused on developing skills to secure external funding.

5.3. Discussion of Questionnaire

Following the retreat, the author designed a questionnaire (Appendix 2) intended for Stanislaus State faculty, staff, and administrators. The questionnaire was designed to assess the two primary functions the office staff identified during the retreat: the extent to which ORSP is a knowledgeable and ready resource for the campus community and the extent to which ORSP provides capacity building support for faculty who want receive external funding for their RSCA. The first section of the survey was designed to capture data on the campus community's use of the services provided by ORSP. Respondents were then asked to provide feedback on their experience working with the ORSP staff and if they found the ORSP staff knowledgeable and the services offered helpful.

The next section focused on capturing data to determine what capacity building activities would be useful for those interested in seeking external funding and what potential PIs perceived as barriers to seeking external grant or contract funding. Respondents were provided with a list of potential barriers and also provided the opportunity to include any additional barriers they had experienced or feared might hinder their success as a PI. The questionnaire also solicited feedback on interest in potential workshops that would address those barriers. The final section of the questionnaire gathered data on the respondent's role on campus (i.e. faculty or staff), their home college or unit, and the number of years they have been on campus.

Prior to launching, the survey was vetted by the PI/PD Engagement, Expertise, and Resource (PEER) group. The PEER group is composed of six faculty PIs and staff project directors of the large, institutional, student-focused research and service grants on campus and the Director of ORSP and Post-Award Manager. The group meets regularly to review program activities, share best practices, and identify challenges in managing these awards. The group was provided with an overview of the ORSP staff retreat and the decision to focus the questionnaire on an assessment of the support and capacity building of external grant funding. The group indicated their support of the questionnaire as developed.

After the questionnaire had been thoroughly vetted, it was entered into the Qualtrics on-line survey software tool developed by Qualtrics Labs. Inc. and provided by the Stanislaus State Office of Institutional Research to the campus community through an institutional subscription. The survey included 18 questions (3 of which are demographic questions), it was designed to take less than 10 minutes to complete, and participants were given the opportunity to include additional comments, suggestions, or observations. All faculty, staff, and administrators currently employed at Stanislaus State in any capacity (full-time, part-time, permanent, temporary, tenure-track, not tenure-track) were eligible to participate. As the Office of Institutional Research has found that response rates are highest for Qualtrics surveys launched on Tuesdays,³⁷ an invitation to complete the on-line survey was distributed to faculty and staff via email on Tuesday, March 5, 2019. The response period remained open until Tuesday, March 19, 2019.

³⁷ Veronica Parra, Research Analyst, Office of Institutional Research, Personal communication, March, 2019

Chapter 6. Results and Discussion

6.1. Questionnaire Results

As reported above, the survey was launched to all Stanislaus State faculty, staff, and administrators on Tuesday, March 5, 2019, and left open for responses for two weeks. One automatic reminder was sent seven days after the initial launch of the survey to the email addresses of those who had not yet responded. The survey was closed to responses on the 14th day. In an effort to be as inclusive as possible and not limit the response pool, the survey was sent to all 1,234 current faculty, staff, and administrators. A total of 83 responses were received for a response rate of 6.7%. While the author acknowledges that this is a low response rate given the number of surveys distributed, the responses that were received were in-line with the number of faculty and staff who annually utilize the services of ORSP. Even with the low response rate, the responses that were received provided meaningful data from respondents familiar with ORSP services and therefore the data was worth analyzing and provided interesting results.

6.1.1. Analysis of Demographics

A series of three questions (Questions 14 – 16) at the end of the survey addressed the demographics of the respondents. The data reveals (Figure 1) that of the 83 respondents, 55% have been employed at Stanislaus State for more than 11 years, with 30% working on campus fewer than 5 years, and one respondent disclosing an “other” amount of “over 25 years” of service. It is interesting that a majority of the respondents had more than 11 years of service.



Figure 1: Respondent’s Length of Service at Stanislaus State

The second demographic question asked the respondent to identify their role on campus (Figure 2). A majority of the responses, 59%, were from staff or administrators, with full-time faculty and lecturers making up 41% of the responses. It is not surprising that the majority of responses were received from staff, as staff and administrators account for 61% of Stanislaus State’s full-time workforce.³⁸ It has also been the author’s personal experience that staff tend to be more willing and are quicker to respond to online surveys than are faculty members.

³⁸ “IPEDS Faculty and Staff Trends.” Office of Institutional Research, IPEDS Faculty and Staff Trends. Accessed on April 12, 2019. <https://www.csustan.edu/institutional-research/institutional-data>.

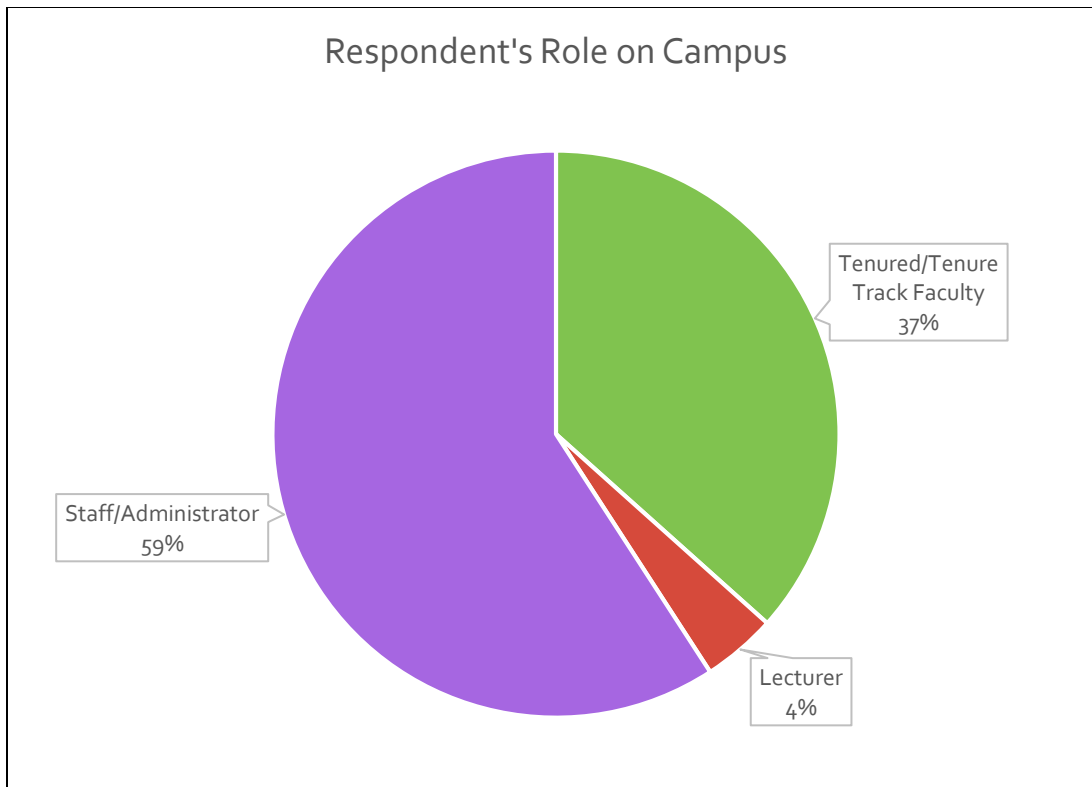


Figure 2: Respondent's Role on Campus

The final demographic question asked respondents to identify their home college or unit. As Figure 3 indicates, the majority of the responses (59%) came from three of the four colleges; the College of Business had significantly fewer responses than its counterparts. This is understandable, as the College of Business Administration faculty have not been active in pursuing external funding for their research. At the time the survey was administered, only one College of Business Administration faculty member had any pending or active grants or contracts. The Business and Finance Department (15%), Academic Affairs (8%), and Student Affairs (4%) each contributed significant percentages of respondents, with the remainder (13%) coming from other units, including the Office of Information Technology, Human Resources, and the Division of Strategic Planning, Enrollment Management, and Innovation. This distribution of respondents is in-line with

the level of interaction the ORSP staff has with the colleges and departments and highlights the wide-ranging reach of ORSP interactions and services.

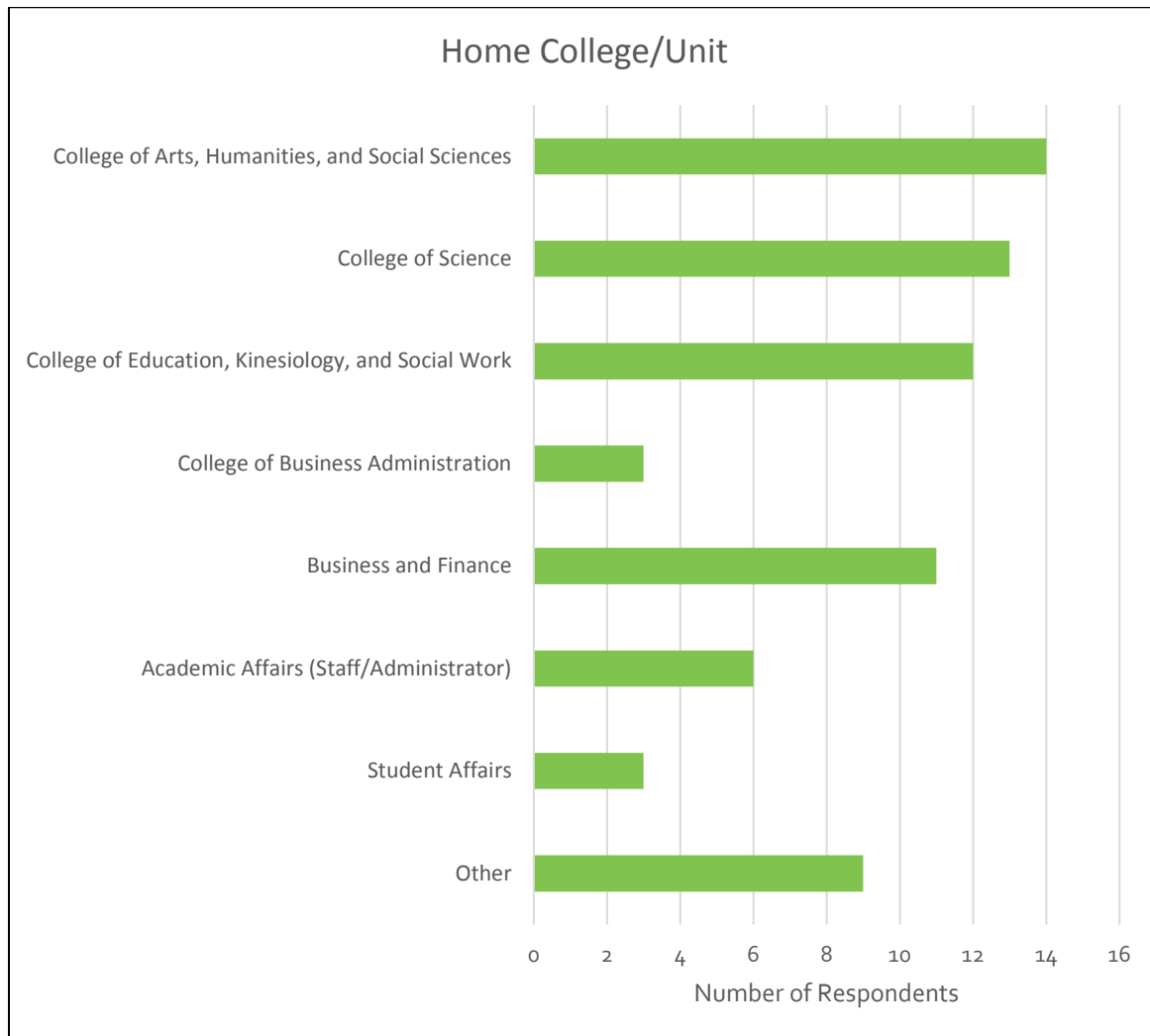


Figure 3: Respondent's Home College or Unit

6.1.2. Analysis of Support Services

The first section of the questionnaire sought to gather data on the support services provided by ORSP. Therefore, the first question in this section was designed to determine which of the ORSP services the respondent had utilized. The eight prime services offered by ORSP (grant prospecting, grant submission, grant proposal editing, research contract negotiation, IRB protocol review, IACUC protocol review, UAS/UAV protocol review, SERSCA

programming) were included as options (Figure 4). Out of the 83 total responses, 53 respondents had utilized at least one of the ORSP services, with 87% of those 53 respondents using two or more services.

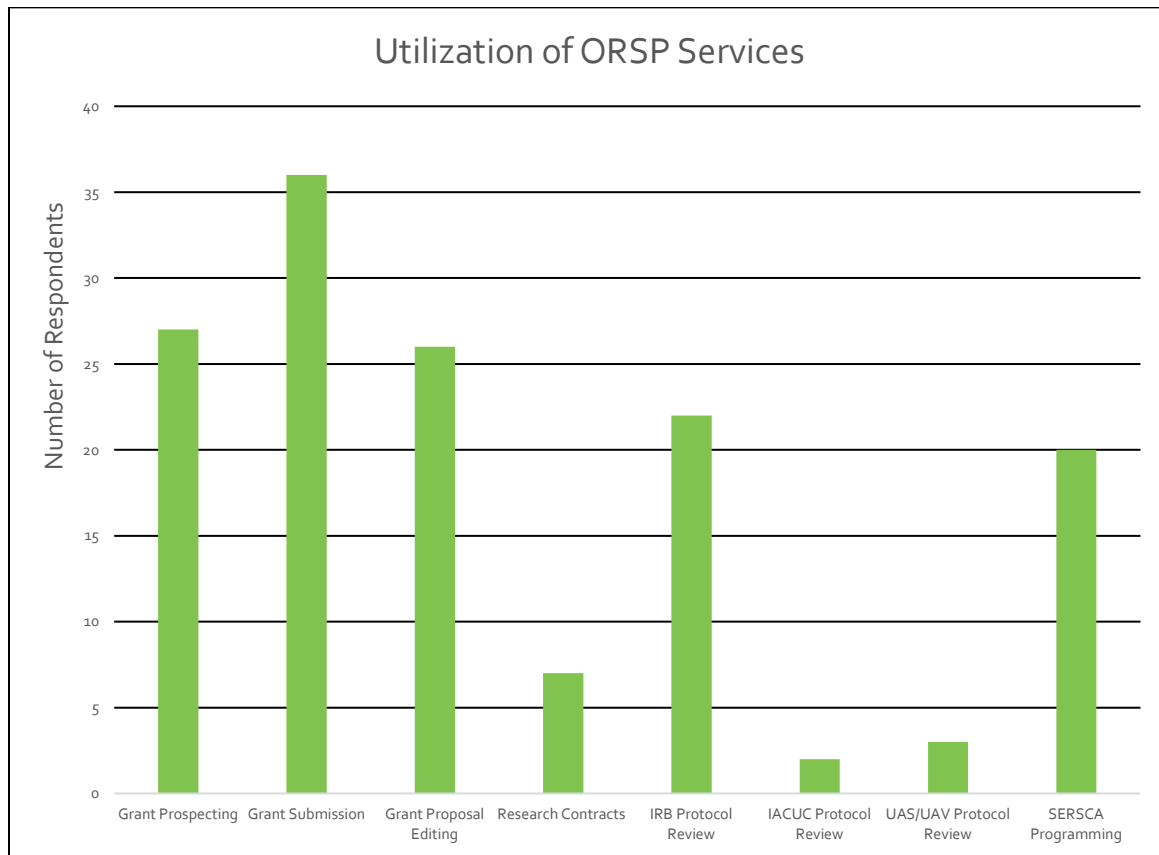


Figure 4: Utilization of ORSP Services

These responses fell in-line with the average ORSP staff activity supporting each of the services provided. While 30 respondents had never used any of listed services, those respondents were allowed to continue with the questionnaire. Because the subsequent section in the questionnaire offers the opportunity for feedback on possible capacity building activities, the author wanted to ensure that potential users of ORSP services had the opportunity to provide their feedback.

The next series of questions (Questions 2-6) were designed to gather information on the level of service ORSP provides to its stakeholders. Given that ORSP is a service unit, the author wanted to measure how the campus community views the accessibility and helpfulness of the unit. The data presented for Questions 2-6 are based on the responses from the 53 respondents who identified that they had actually utilized the ORSP services included in the questionnaire.

Question 2 asked for a rating of either positive, neutral, or negative in five categories detailing the overall user experience in working with ORSP. The categories rated included the submission of applications for the following: grant or research contract, IRB protocol, IACUC protocol, UAS/UAV/Drone protocol, and SERSCA award (Figure 5).

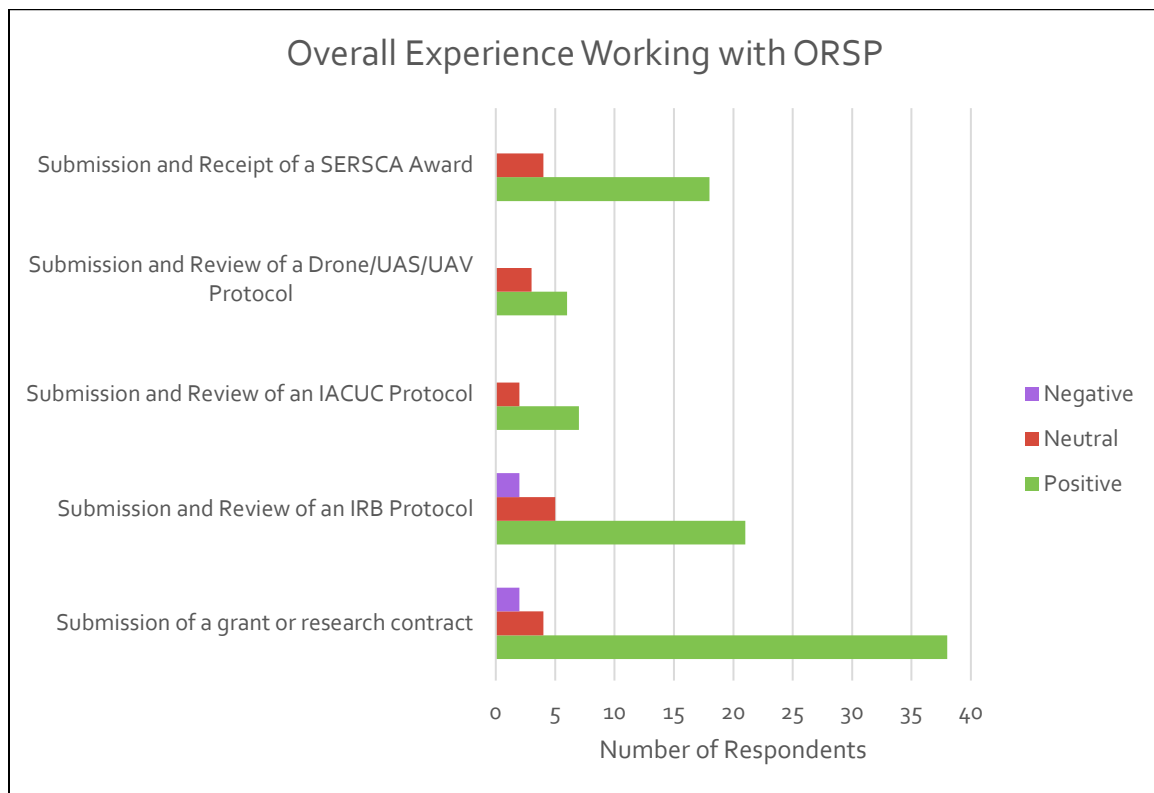


Figure 5: Rating of Overall Experience Working with ORSP

Overwhelmingly, the response to all of the categories was positive, with only two respondents stating they had a negative experience with the IRB and grant submission process. Of the two respondents with a negative experience, one was a faculty member and one was a staff member. It was expected that there would be neutral or negative responses to this question. These processes, especially the submission and review of IRB protocols, are complicated and can be administratively burdensome, especially to those unfamiliar with the process. While it is concerning that two respondents had a negative experience, it was encouraging to the author that the majority of respondents had an overall positive experience.

The five categories referenced in this question represent the majority of the activities performed by ORSP and, given that ORSP is a service-oriented office, the author believed it was important to establish a baseline of overall satisfaction related to these services. It was especially important to establish a satisfaction rate for grant and contract submission. As described above, the focus of the self study was to determine the extent that ORSP is seen as a resource and how ORSP can help build capacity to increase externally funded RSCA at Stanislaus State. Had there been more negative responses this would have signaled a possible unwillingness of faculty and staff to work with ORSP. However, the positive response rate of 86% to the grant and contract submission process signals that the ORSP staff is service-oriented and responsive to the needs of faculty and staff. These responses provide ORSP a solid base on which to grow.

Continuing to explore stakeholder satisfaction rates, Question 3 asked for a yes or no response to eight categories ranking the helpfulness of the ORSP staff and their knowledge about funding opportunities (Figure 6).

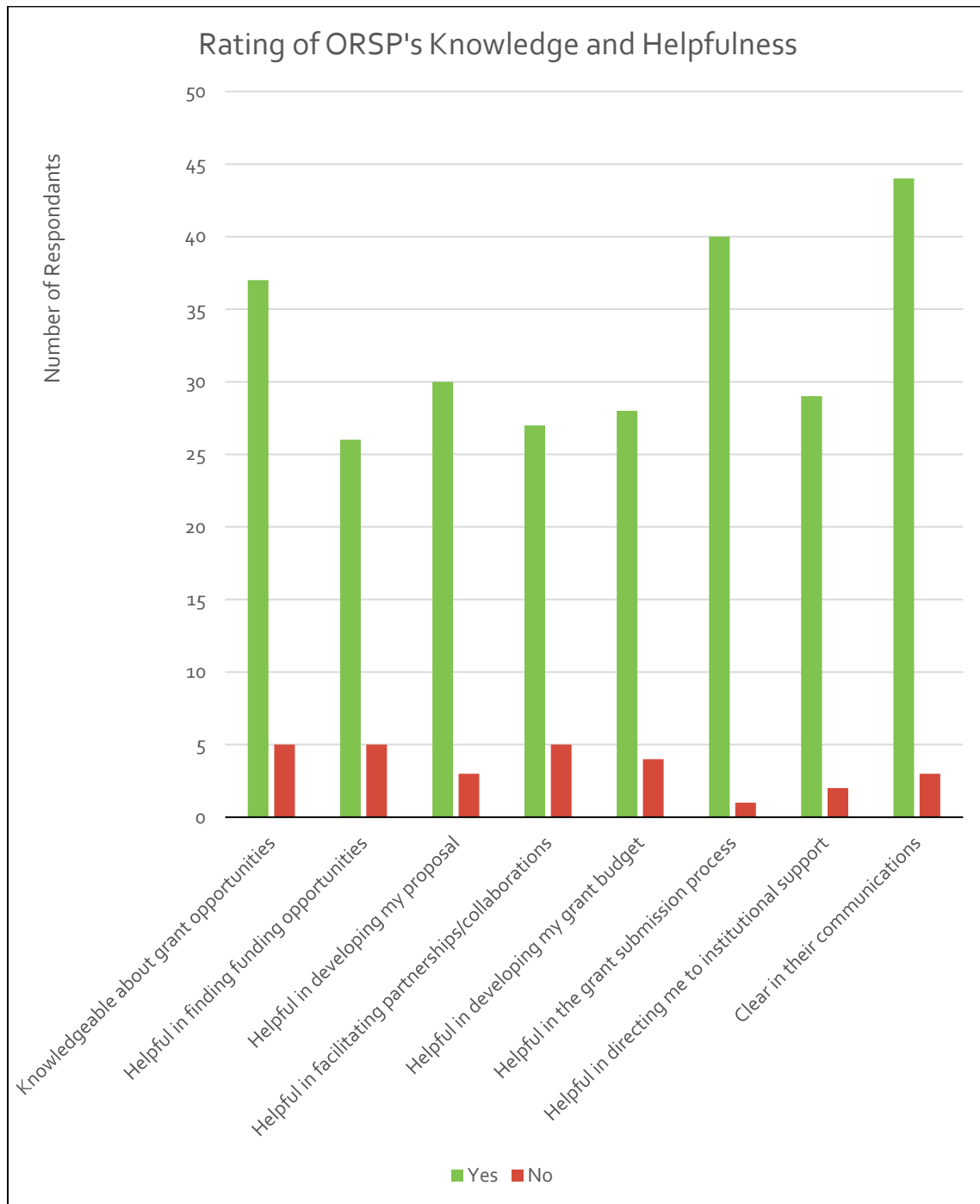


Figure 6: Rating of ORSP's Knowledge and Helpfulness

Each of the eight items had a range of 31 to 47 total responses. The questionnaire did not require an answer for each item, which explains the difference in response rates. Given the range of services provided by ORSP it is assumed that those respondents who did not rate all of the items may not have had direct experience in all of the areas. The data indicate that each of the items had an approval rating of at least 84%, with the highest rated items being helpfulness in the grant submission process (98%), and being clear in communications and directing respondents to institutional support (both at 94% approval). These ratings demonstrated that ORSP provides good customer service and that navigating the submission process is not seen as a hindrance to submitting grant proposals. This is further supported by the high ratings for ORSP staff being knowledgeable about grant opportunities (88%) and being helpful in developing the proposal (91%) and grant budget (88%).

While the data are mostly positive, there were two categories, helpfulness in finding funding opportunities and facilitating partnerships or collaborations, that both received a negative response from 16% of respondents (representing 5 responses each). This highlights an opportunity for ORSP to make improvements. To date, very few ORSP resources have been devoted to curating and disseminating funding opportunities to faculty who are not currently active investigators. While ORSP recently sponsored one networking opportunity for faculty, this was the first research mixer to be held on campus in over six years. The positive response to that event and the lower ratings received on this question, clearly underscore the need for additional events and opportunities for faculty to build research collaborations and partnerships.

An integral part of being a service office is ensuring that the stakeholders trust the accuracy of the information received from the office. Question 4 was designed to solicit feedback on whether or not respondents trusted the information received related to federal regulations, institutional policies, and requirements found in calls for proposals (Figure 7). This question offered an opportunity for respondents to answer “N/A” if they did not have experience working with ORSP in these areas.

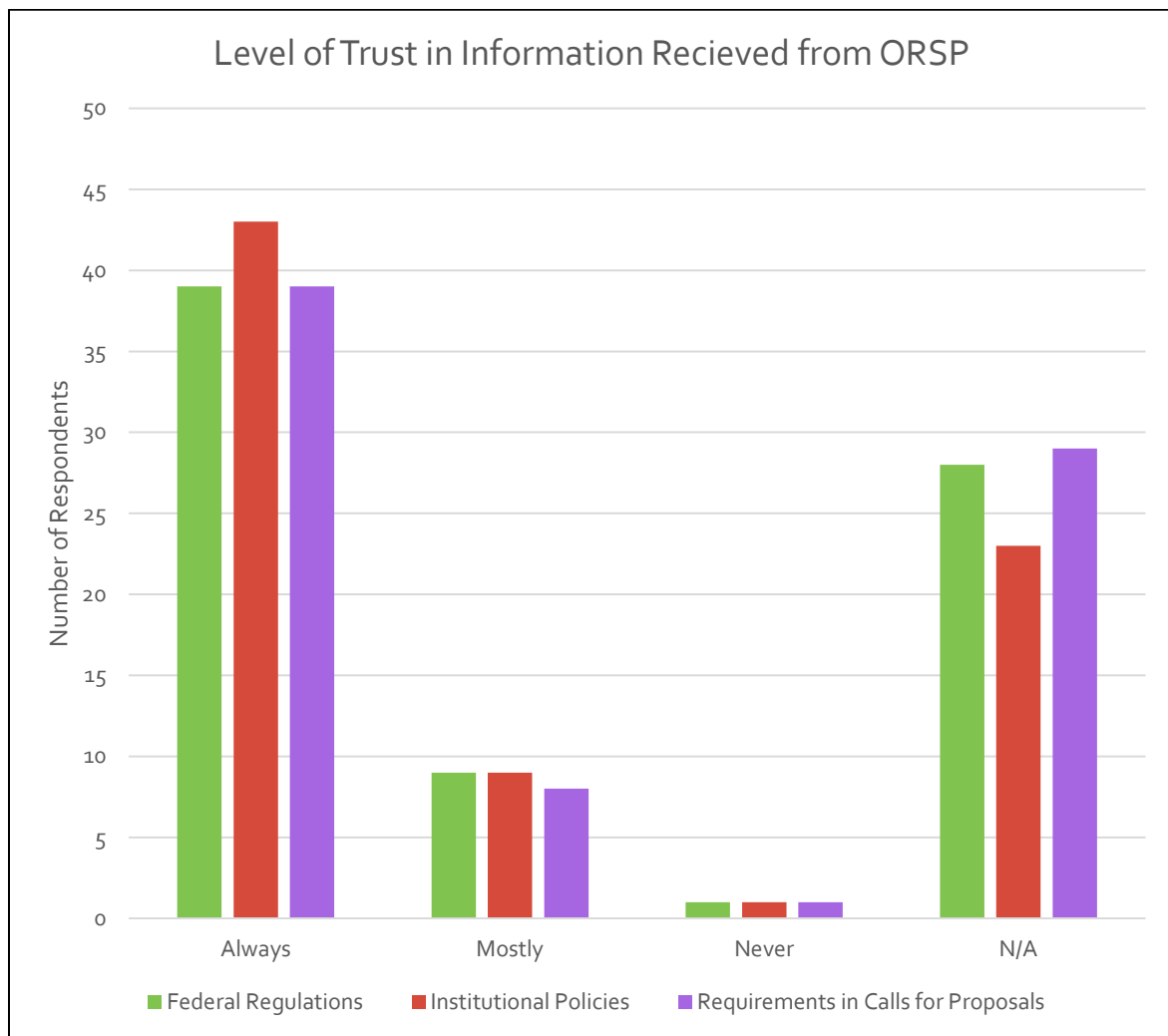


Figure 7: Level of Trust in Information Received from ORSP

For those respondents where it was applicable, only one respondent claimed to never trust ORSP’s accuracy on all three items. That particular respondent indicated in

Question 1 that they had only used two of ORSP's services – grant prospecting and IRB submission. While it is distressing to receive feedback that one respondent does not trust the accuracy of information provided by ORSP, given the limited level of interaction the respondent had with ORSP, the author assumes that the response is most likely the result of one isolated negative interaction.

Of the 49 respondents who rated their trust level in the accuracy of information received from ORSP, 39 respondents (80%) indicated always having trust in the information received. Respondents had a slightly higher rating of 81% of always trusting ORSP on institutional policies and interpreting the requirements in calls for proposals. The author acknowledges the difficulty in being at a PUI where the ORSP staff needs to be an expert in all areas. However, with approximately 20% of the respondents "mostly" trusting ORSP, there is room to build trust. This presents an opportunity for additional staff professional development and training to ensure the tools are available to the ORSP staff to be able to provide accurate information in all areas.

Question 5 solicited feedback on the investigators' satisfaction with the transition of services from pre-award to post-award. Because the two offices function under separate divisions and are physically housed in separate locations, there is a chance that the level of customer service support might drop during the transition. Figure 8 shows the 61 responses to this question with 31 respondents choosing "other." Those who chose "other" reported that they had not yet been successful in securing external funds and had not experienced the transition of support from pre- to post-award. Of the remaining 30 responses, 24 respondents stated they were very satisfied with the transition with the

remaining six divided equally between somewhat satisfied and dissatisfied. Ensuring that funded investigators are supported as they transition from pre-award to post-award is the third goal in the ORSP Strategic Plan. With the realization that faculty at Stanislaus State are not required to pursue external funding in support of their RSCA, the pre- and post-award offices are dedicated to ensuring that those faculty who choose to pursue external funding are well supported and successful in the management of their grant awards. These data demonstrate that the majority of investigators feel supported; however a handful have not had a positive experience. Moving forward, additional resources should be devoted to identifying what difficulties investigators are encountering during the transition.

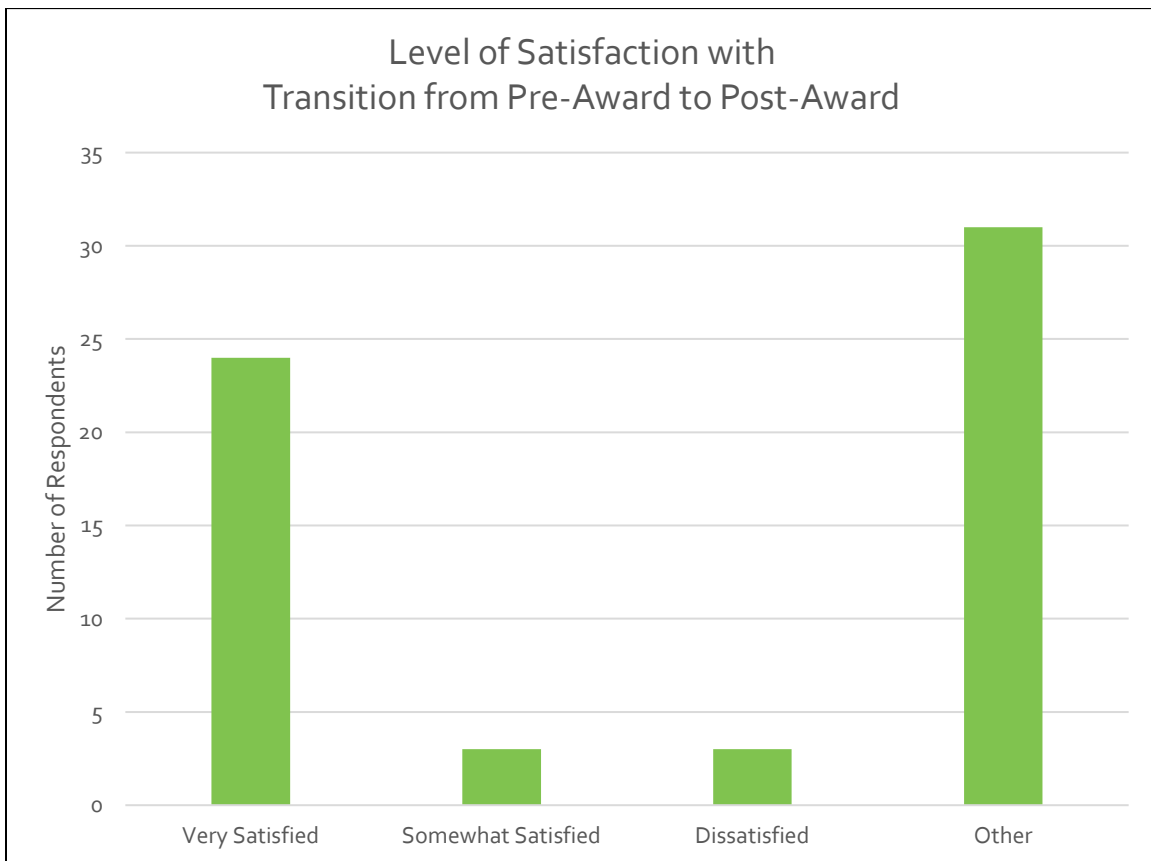


Figure 8: Level of Satisfaction with Transition from Pre- to Post-Award

The final question to gauge customer service satisfaction asked respondents to rate their agreement with the following statements: it is easy to get in contact with ORSP, emails are answered quickly, the ORSP website is used as a resource, and the internal grant approval process is easy to navigate (Figure 9).

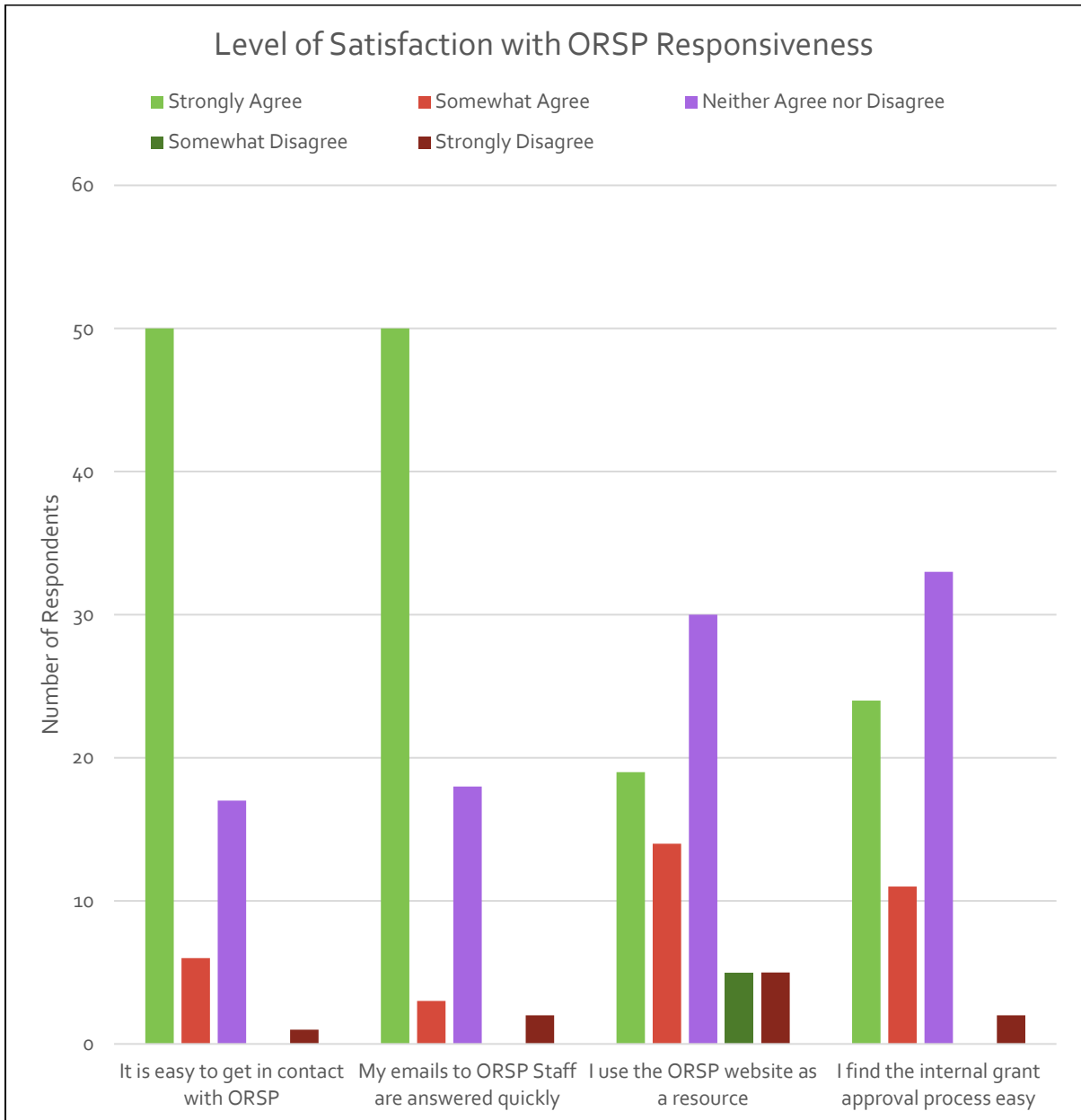


Figure 9: Level of Satisfaction with ORSP Responsiveness

Access to the ORSP staff received high ratings, with 79% of the 74 respondents strongly agreeing that it is easy to get in contact with ORSP staff and that their emails to ORSP staff are answered quickly. Not fairing as well was the respondents' satisfaction with the internal grant approval process. Only 43% strongly agree that the process is easy to navigate, with the majority (53%) either somewhat agreeing or neither agreeing nor disagreeing. Only two respondents strongly disagreed with the ease of the process. The internal grant routing and approval process is a paper-based system that requires wet signatures at seven stages of approval. Therefore, it is understandable that the process does not receive high satisfaction scores. Most surprising was the response to whether the ORSP website is viewed as a resource; only 28% strongly agreed with this statement. A total of 46% were either neutral or disagreed that the website is a resource. This finding was surprising and disturbing to the author, as the ORSP staff rely heavily on the website to disseminate information and provide resources. It is possible that these responses indicate either (1) the website is not a resource to those who need it or (2) the website is not used by the respondents because they do not have routine contact with ORSP and therefore do not need to use the website as a resource. Again, given the ORSP staff reliance on the website, it will be important to further explore the way Stanislaus State faculty and staff utilize the ORSP website.

6.1.3. Analysis of Capacity Building

The next seven questions focused on the capacity of the respondents to seek external funding. The two main areas identified during the ORSP staff retreat as important to the daily functioning of the office were customer service and capacity building for faculty

and staff investigators in seeking extramural funding. The data for Questions 7-13 include the responses from all 83 respondents. Unlike the support services questions (Questions 2-6) that only focused on those who had used the services, this section sought to elicit feedback about capacity building and therefore included all respondents, even if they had no previous interaction with ORSP. The author did not want to limit these responses as the focus of this self-study was to evaluate current practices and solicit feedback on ways to enhance support for faculty to engage in externally funded research. Had responses been limited to just currently active researchers, informative data would not have been collected from the target audience – faculty members who have not yet pursued external funding for their research.

Question 7 established a baseline for grant activity by asking the respondents how many external proposals they had submitted in the previous 5 years (Figure 10).

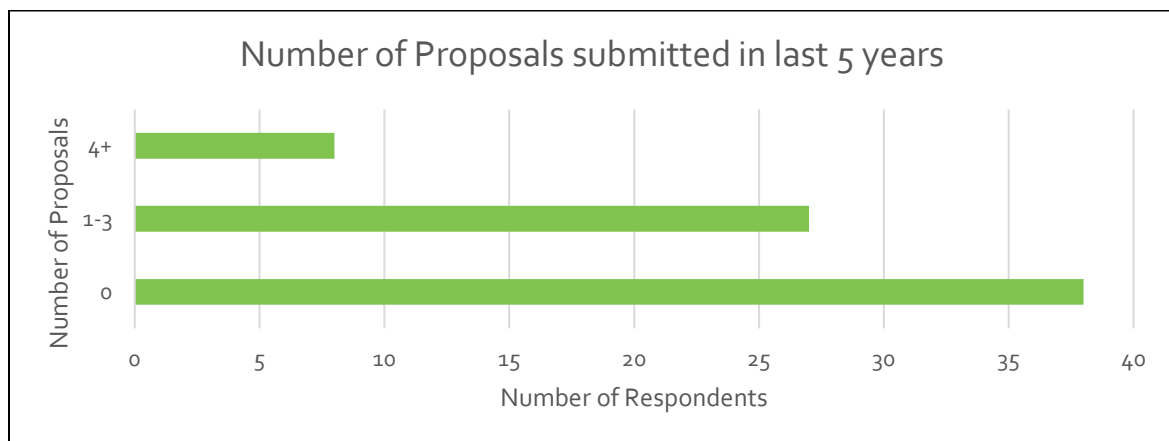


Figure 10: Respondent's Number of Proposals Submitted in Last 5 Years

Given the current research portfolio at Stanislaus State, it was not surprising that the majority of respondents had never submitted a proposal (52%). The remainder consisted of 37% submitting between 1-3 proposals and 11% submitting more than 4 proposals in the previous five years. As would be expected, those respondents who submitted more than

three proposals are faculty members who have more than 11 years of service at Stanislaus State.

The author found it encouraging that of the 27 respondents who had submitted between 1-3 proposals, nine were faculty with less than five years of service at Stanislaus State. This demonstrates an interest by junior faculty to pursue external funding, and senior administration has expressed a desire to provide targeted support to this group.

To further examine the motivation of the respondents, Question 8 asked how important external funding is to the respondent's RSCA (Figure 11). Stanislaus State is an undergraduate institution where the focus is on student success, not externally funded research. There are multiple opportunities for faculty to pursue internal funding for their research. The Office of the Provost holds an annual grant competition with \$200,000 available to support successful grants with an individual budget of up to \$10,000 per award. The College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences and the College of Science offer additional funding opportunities to their faculty in the form of research mini-grants and travel grants to disseminate their research at professional conferences. As the focus of this section is to gather information that will inform the development of capacity building and support activities provided by ORSP, it was important to establish a pool of respondents who have a desire to seek external funding for their research.

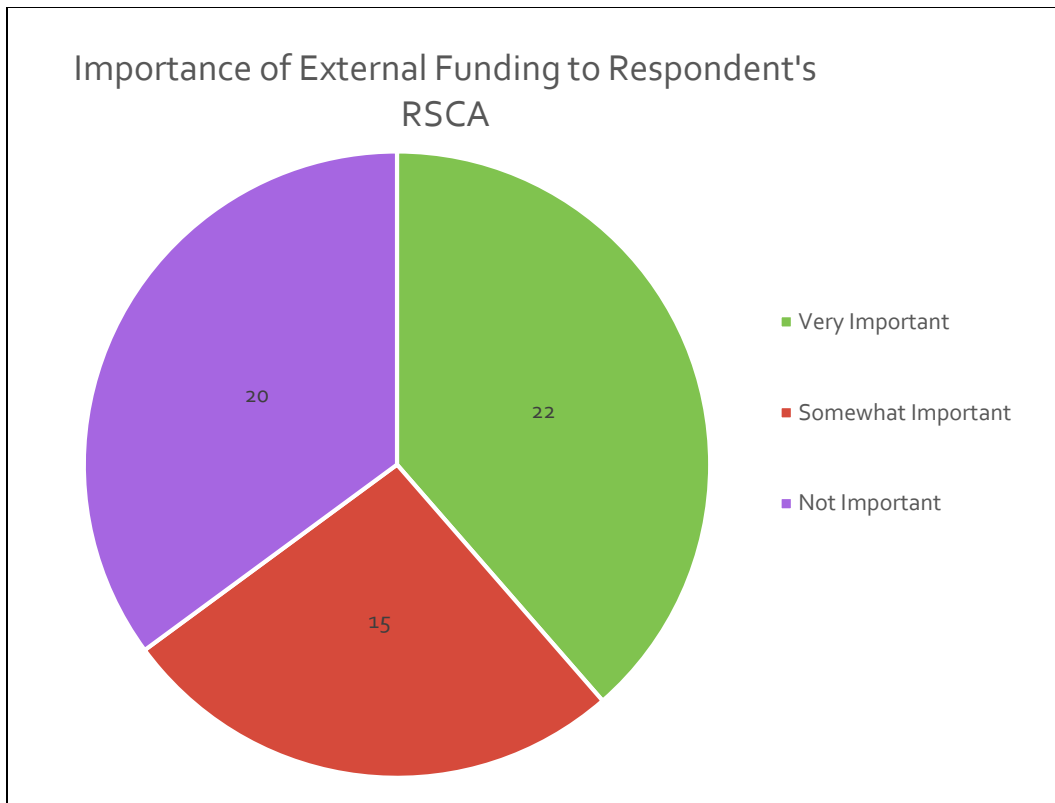


Figure 11: Respondent's Rating of Importance of External Funding to the RSCA

Only 35% of the 57 respondents reported that external funding is not at all important to their RSCA. This left 15 respondents or 26% finding external funding somewhat important and 22 respondents or 39% finding external funding very important to their RSCA. Given that over 65% of the respondents find external funding important to their academic and professional success, there is clearly a need for ORSP to offer services and tools to help faculty, staff, and administrators pursue external funding.

In order to develop programs to support the development of grant and contract proposals, the author wanted to assess the current confidence level of the respondents in their ability to pursue externally funded research. Question 9 asked for a rating of very confident, somewhat confident, or not at all confident on the following five grant activities:

seeking funding sources, writing a grant proposal, developing a grant budget, conducting research, and administering a grant (Figure 12).

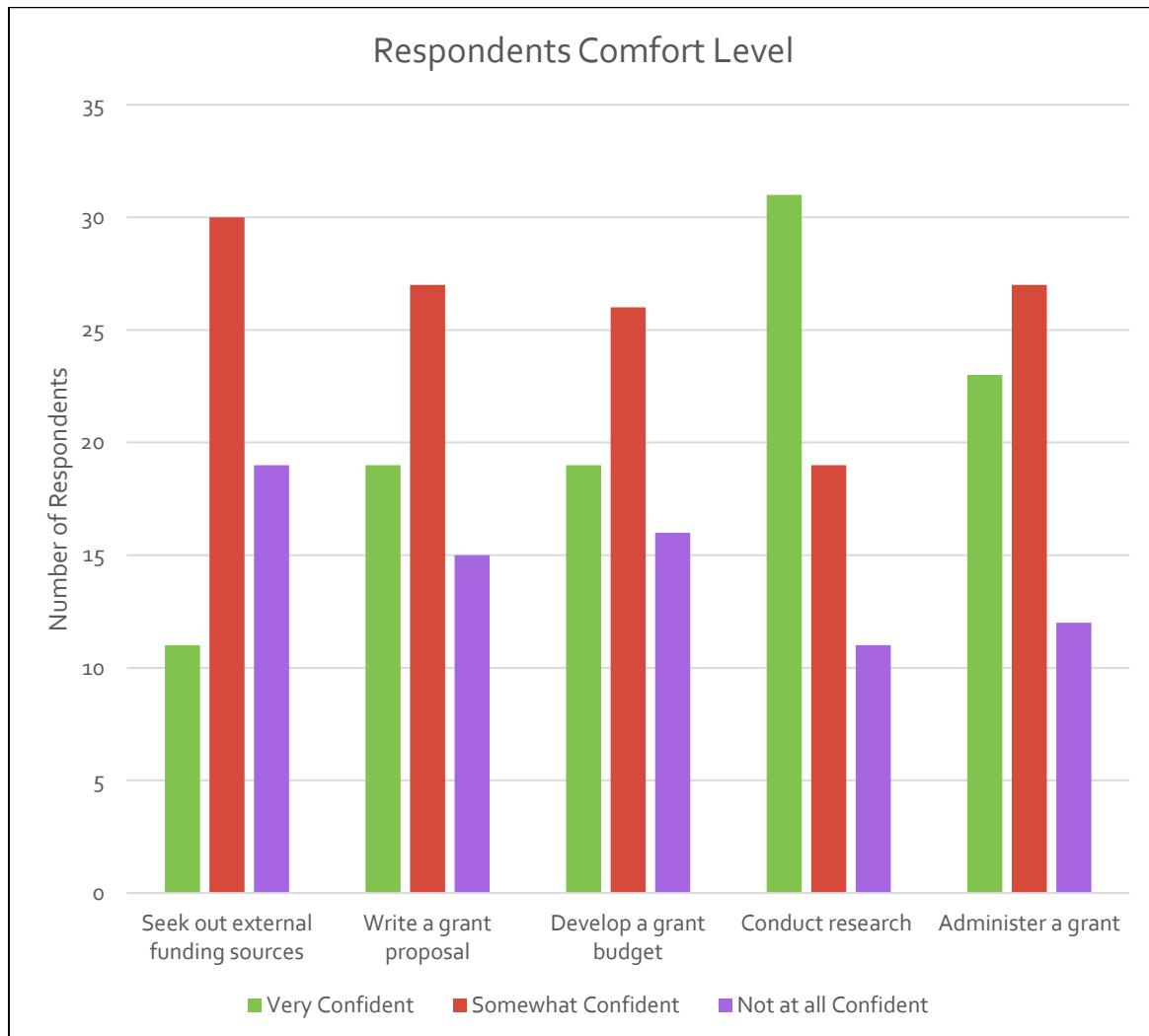


Figure 12: Respondent's Confidence in Seeking Funding and Conducting Research

There was a lack of confidence among the 61 respondents in their ability to write a grant proposal (24%) and to develop a grant budget (26%). However, the data were more encouraging with respect to research itself as 51% reported being very confident in their ability to conduct research. It is telling that the majority of responses fell into the middle category of being somewhat confident in their abilities. The first three activities of finding

funding sources, grant writing, and budget development provide rich opportunities for ORSP to offer its support. The skills of grant writing and budget development can be acquired with training and practice. The willingness of the respondents to honestly rate their capabilities gives the author clear direction on where to devote the limited ORSP support and training resources. Somewhat distressing to the author were the 11 of the 61 respondents who reported no confidence in their ability to conduct research. Upon further examination, only 2 of those responses were from tenured/tenure track faculty or lecturers, with the remaining 9 respondents being staff members.

The next question asked respondents to indicate if they had encountered any of the following barriers to their seeking external funding: lack of time, lack of grant writing experience, lack of funding opportunities, lack of knowledge of potential funding opportunities, lack of equipment to conduct research, or lack of space to conduct research (Figure 13).

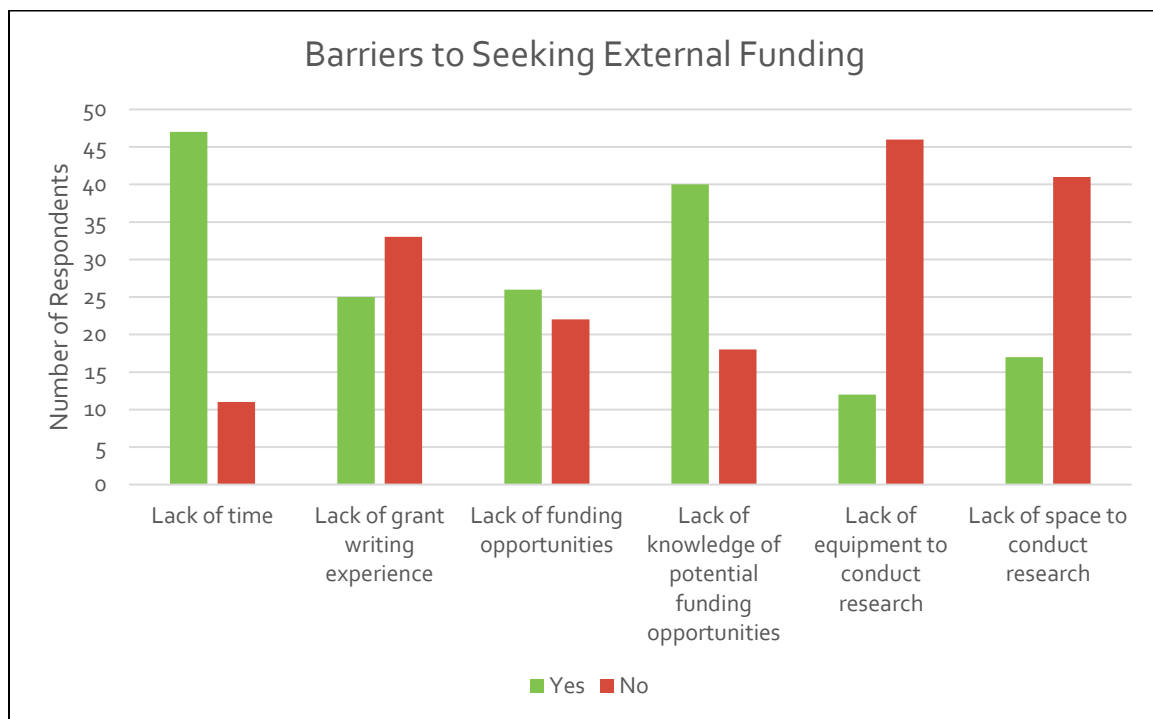


Figure 13: Respondent's Perceived Barriers to Seeking External Funding

The three top barriers reported by 58 respondents were the lack of time (81%), lack of knowledge of funding opportunities (69%), and lack of funding opportunities (43%). Given the teaching demands placed on Stanislaus State faculty it is not surprising that the lack of time to write a grant proposal ranks as the most significant barrier. Recently there has been some acknowledgement by senior administration of the lack of time as a barrier for faculty to seek externally funded research. The College of Science is in the first year of a pilot program that allows faculty to apply to receive a limited amount of release time from teaching duties for one semester in order to write and submit a grant proposal to an external funding agency. It will be interesting to see if that program has an impact on the number of grants received in the College of Science. While the ORSP staff has little control over faculty time, this data clearly shows that advocacy for additional time for faculty to pursue their RSCA is needed. The high response rate to the lack of knowledge of potential funding opportunities and grant writing experience reinforces the results obtained in Question 9. Again, this is an area where additional support and services provided by ORSP could have a positive impact.

The questions concerning lack of space and equipment to conduct research were posed because the lack of space on campus is a common complaint of faculty and staff. Stanislaus State's enrollment has been on the rise over the past five years, and with no increase in classroom or research space the campus is beginning to feel the crunch. Given these trends it is fascinating that 79% of the respondents reported no issues with a lack of equipment and another 71% reported no issue with a lack of space as a barrier to conduct research. This leads the author to believe that either those who have complained in the

past did not participate in the questionnaire or that the allocation of space is not a factor in the type of research conducted by the respondents to this questionnaire. Given the teaching mission of the University, it is also possible that respondents habitually prioritize classroom space over research space.

This question provides further evidence that the factors affecting the low engagement in extramural funding fall primarily with an individuals' capacity (either due to a lack of time, experience, or ability) to pursue external funding.

As a follow-up to Question 10, Question 11 asked respondents to list any other barriers they have encountered that were not mentioned in the previous question. Of the six responses submitted, two identified barriers encountered after securing funding. A common theme within those responses was the difficult and time-consuming process of navigating the Human Resources Office's procedures to hire the required staff for a research project in a timely manner. The other barriers cited were lack of release time from teaching to write proposals, lack of institutional support, extreme delays in getting the internal grant accounts set up in the financial system, and barriers with the external funder. The response to this question illustrates how many different departments are intricately involved in the support of extramural research. These comments are an effective reminder that when a support office, like Human Resources, becomes a barrier to seeking grants, that impact is felt by the entire research enterprise on campus.

In an effort to identify opportunities to address the barriers encountered in pursuing extramural funding, Question 12 asked respondents to rate which types of capacity building workshops they would attend (Figure 14). In the past, the ORSP staff have relied on

delivering workshops as a way to support faculty in their grant development activities; however, participation in those workshops has been spotty. This question was designed to determine if workshops are appealing to the respondents, and if so, what topics are most interesting to them. It was encouraging to see that only 11 out of 83 respondents indicated that they would not attend any of the proposed workshops. Grant writing and prospecting were the highest rated topics.

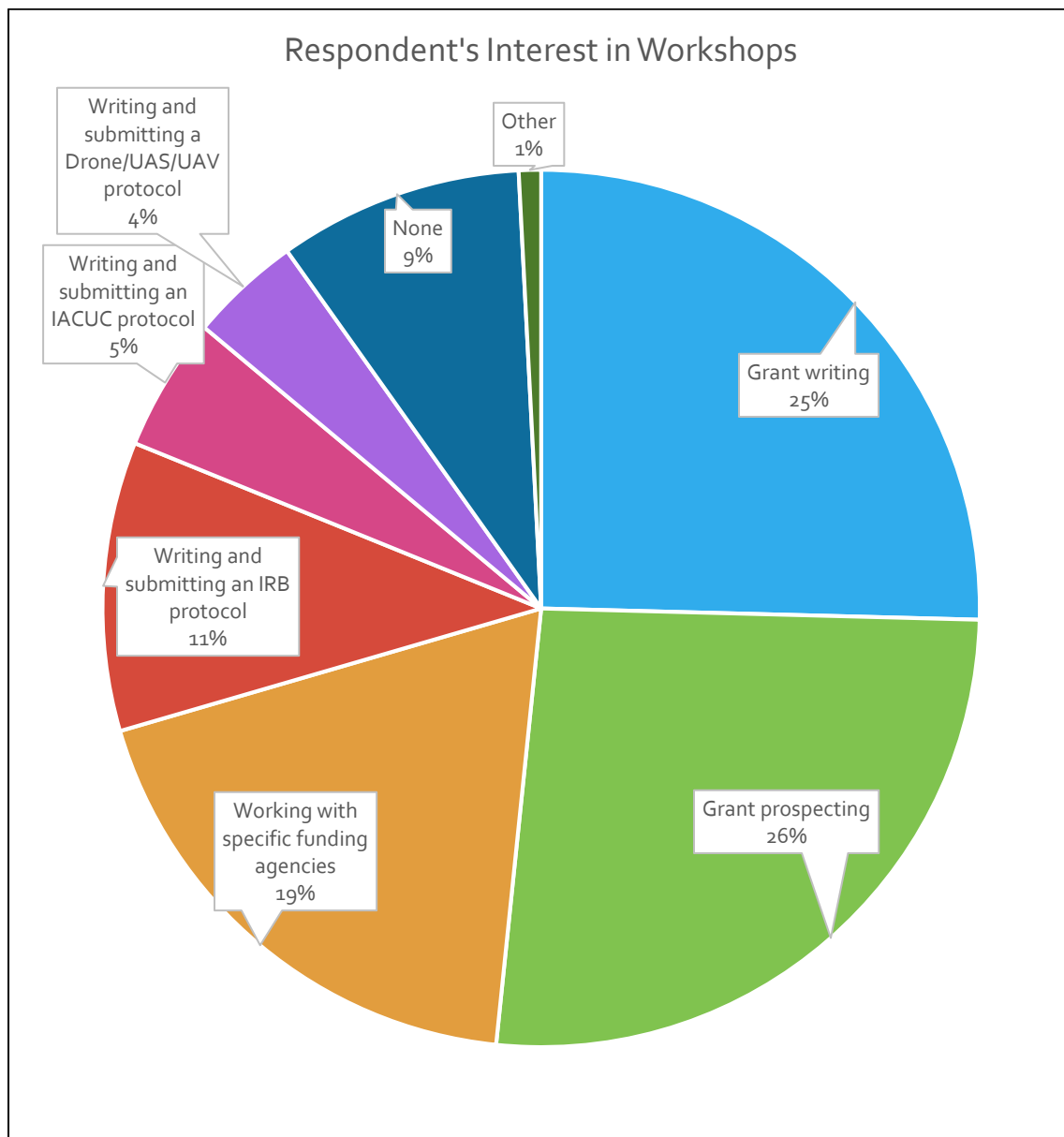


Figure 14: Respondent's Level of Interest in Potential Grant Workshops

Again, these are the two workshops that ORSP currently offers; therefore, these response rates are encouraging and will bolster support for additional outreach in an effort to increase attendance. The question also offered a chance to suggest other relevant workshop topics. The only response to this question did not offer an additional workshop suggestion, but rather remarked that they would attend most of the listed workshops if they were offered in webinar format.

Question 13 asked if it would be helpful to receive monthly emails from ORSP highlighting upcoming funding opportunities. This question was posed because there has been an ongoing conversation at Stanislaus State about appropriate methods to disseminate information to faculty and staff. In the Fall 2018 semester the Office of Communications centralized the distribution of all email announcements into one batch announcement that is distributed weekly. This change came after respondents to a survey distributed by the Office of Communications indicated a high level of email announcement fatigue and suggested that a centralized distribution of information was preferred over the previous method of receiving multiple email messages throughout the day. However, this recently introduced centralized alert system has presented new problems, with faculty and staff not reviewing the weekly announcement and therefore missing important information. Given that 46% of respondents to the ORSP survey stated they would find it helpful to receive funding announcement emails (Figure 15), there appears to be an opportunity to create a monthly distribution of funding opportunities to be sent directly to faculty and staff who choose to receive them.

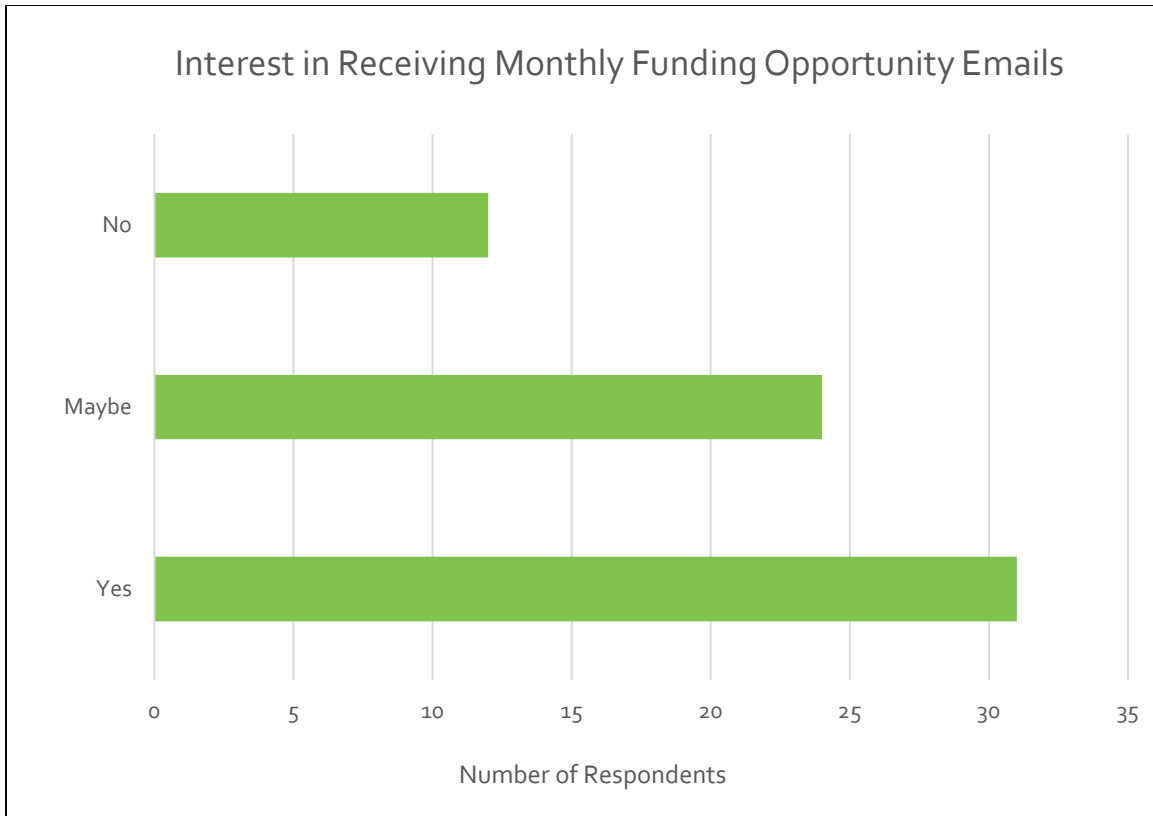


Figure 15: Respondent's Level of Interest in Receiving Funding Announcement Emails

Chapter 7. Recommendations and Discussion

7.1. Introduction

Assessment of ORSP took an in-depth look at how the support services provided and how the engagement activities of faculty and staff wishing to support their RSCA through external funding can be improved. The author recognizes the utility of standard quantitative metrics, including numbers of proposals funded and dollars awarded, to evaluate sponsored activity on campuses; it is clear that numbers tell a story. With the realization that there is more to the story, this project afforded the opportunity to look beyond standard measures and use qualitative measures to see if additional insights could be identified. The review of assessment measures focused on the services provided by ORSP and an assessment of faculty's perceptions of their research and grantsmanship capacity provided exceedingly useful information for recommendations of areas to be addressed in the next iteration of the ORSP strategic plan.

The primary goal of ORSP is to support faculty, staff, and administrators in their pursuit of extramural funding of their research, scholarship, and creative activities. The results of the assessment detailed in this Capstone Project have led to the recommendations described below.

7.2. Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Devote time and resources to the outreach and marketing of ORSP services.

The responses to the questionnaire provide a clear picture of the faculty, staff, and administrator investigators who are using ORSP services; unfortunately, it was a relatively

small group. It is encouraging that survey respondents who had not previously utilized ORSP continued the questionnaire and responded favorably to the capacity building questions. Development of a comprehensive outreach plan should be undertaken. This should include ORSP staff visiting and presenting an overview of ORSP services and programs at department meetings, college faculty meetings, and any relevant administrative committee meeting. Newly hired and junior faculty should be a prime target in this outreach plan, especially since the majority of survey respondents had over 11 years on campus.

Recommendation 2: Redesign the ORSP website so that it becomes a resource for researchers to utilize.

It was surprising that a majority of the survey respondents did not rely on the ORSP website as a resource. This finding is particularly troubling to the author, as the website is currently the main avenue ORSP uses to disseminate information. The ORSP staff should meet with the Communications Office to review the current website and look for areas of improvement. The senior administration at Stanislaus State has been encouraging faculty and departments to establish a presence on social media. It is seen as a supplement to the formal information housed on the University website. While the author does envision using social media to support grant development, it may be worthwhile to first test its effectiveness on communicating program deadlines and generally raising awareness of the office and the services provided.

Recommendation 3: Build support activities that assist investigators in identifying potential funding opportunities.

A reported barrier to seeking funding was a lack of knowledge of suitable funding opportunities. While ORSP currently manages a subscription to a funding database search engine, it is not being used to its full capacity. The marketing plan in Recommendation 1 should include information on the ability of each faculty and staff member to create an individually tailored funding opportunity alert that is received via a monthly email. Training sessions and workshops that provide one-on-one support should be offered at least once per semester. ORSP should hold dedicated weekly office hours highlighting upcoming opportunities and allow faculty and staff a time to drop-in to review specific funding opportunities and have their questions answered.

Recommendation 4: Develop and implement support activities that build grant writing and budget development skills.

A common complaint from faculty and administrators at Stanislaus State is the lack of a grant writer on staff in ORSP. The fact that the results of the questionnaire indicate that only a quarter of the respondents felt no confidence in their ability to write a grant proposal suggests that this complaint is not supported by the data. While it is encouraging that most faculty are confident in their abilities, there is always room for improvement. Therefore, it is recommended that workshops be offered to develop grant writing skills, that external mentors be engaged to work with faculty who have yet to receive funding, and that ORSP establish and host peer writing support groups to provide faculty dedicated time and one-on-one support as they write their proposal.

While the ORSP staff is ultimately responsible for developing the budgets for grant proposals, offering trainings and workshops on budgeting best practices will give

investigators insight into how to develop a budget. Understanding the basics of building a grant budget can help in the early stages of project conception. Having a sense of what can be accomplished within a specific funding range can aid in the development of a realistic and fundable project.

Recommendation 5: Work with University administration to identify opportunities to provide faculty members protected time to pursue extramural grant funding.

Not surprisingly, given Stanislaus States' focus on teaching, the prime barrier to seeking grant funding is a lack of time. While ORSP does not have the ability to eliminate this barrier, it can advocate on behalf of the faculty for a reduction in faculty workload when appropriate to support the development of grant proposals. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the College of Science is piloting a program that provides protected writing time for faculty applying for external funding (with a requirement that the granting agency allows for the full federal indirect cost rate). This type of innovative approach to supporting faculty research should be championed across the colleges. ORSP should work with senior leadership and the college deans to identify other mechanisms to support faculty time for grant development.

Recommendation 6: Increase the number and variety of capacity building activities offered by ORSP.

To date, ORSP workshops have focused on general grant preparation and applying to the IRB for human subjects research approval. It is recommended that a suite of in-person workshops and other activities be developed and offered throughout the academic year. Suggestions include a focus on specific funding agencies (i.e. National Institutes of Health,

National Science Foundation) and exploring ways to collaborate and form multidisciplinary teams. In addition to the in-person workshops, short informational videos about grant prospecting and writing, budgeting, and the other services offered by ORSP should be created and made available to the campus community through the appropriate venues identified in the marketing and outreach plan.

The recommendations discussed above provide ORSP the opportunity to build activities that directly support the University Strategic Plan goal of building capacity to increase success in securing extramural grant funding that supports faculty, staff, and student engagement in research, scholarship, and creative activity. Using the qualitative results from the assessment questionnaire distributed as part of this Capstone Project allows for the development of activities that will provide measurable outcomes.

Chapter 8. Conclusion

Program assessment and evaluation is an invaluable tool used by academic institutions to ensure that the academic and support service offices are meeting the goals of the department, unit, college, and institution as a whole. These assessments provide valuable information on the activities of the units, their successes, and their potential. Assessments of sponsored programs offices often rely on reporting quantitative metrics to paint a picture of the overall productivity and success of the office. However, relying on just those numbers did not accurately portray the scope of activity and services provided by ORSP at Stanislaus State. By widening the assessment to include the collection of qualitative data that reviewed the support services provided and the potential opportunities for capacity building, ORSP was able to provide a more nuanced assessment. The next steps will be to develop a new draft strategic plan for ORSP that incorporates the findings from this assessment and implements the recommendations. This will provide a solid base for continued assessment and refinement of services that will support faculty in seeking and securing extramural grant funding.

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Appendix 1. Questionnaire

ORSP Support Unit Review 2019

Start of Block: Working with ORSP

Q1 Have you used any of the following services provided by the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs (ORSP)?

	Yes	No
Grant prospecting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Grant submission	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Grant proposal editing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Research contract negotiation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
IRB protocol review	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
IACUC protocol review	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Drone/UAS/UAV review	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
SERSCA programming (Student Research Competition, Student Travel Grants, Student Mini-Grants, Student Assistantships)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q2 How would you rate your overall experience in working with ORSP on each of the following?

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	N/A
Submission of a grant or research contract	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Submission and review of an IRB protocol	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Submission and review of an IACUC protocol	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Submission and review of a Drone/UAS/UAV protocol	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Submission and receipt of a SERSCA award	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q3 When working with ORSP on grant and contract submissions, I found them to be:

	Yes	No	N/A
Knowledgeable about grant opportunities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Helpful in finding funding opportunities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Helpful in developing my proposal	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Helpful in facilitating partnerships/collaborations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Helpful in developing my grant budget	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Helpful in the grant submission process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Helpful in directing me to institutional support	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Clear in their communications	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q4 Do you trust the accuracy of the information you receive from ORSP in the interpretation of the following:

	Always	Mostly	Never	N/A
Federal regulations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Institutional policies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Requirements in calls for proposals	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q5 When you received external funding, how satisfied were you with the transition of grant support from pre-award to post-award?

- ☐ Very satisfied
- ☐ Somewhat satisfied
- ☐ Dissatisfied
- ☐ Other _____
-

Q6 Please rate your agreement with the following statements:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
It is easy to get in contact with ORSP	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My emails to ORSP staff are answered quickly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I use the ORSP website as a resource	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I find the internal grant approval process easy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: Working with ORSP

Start of Block: Your Overall Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activity (RSCA)

Q7 How many external grant proposals or research contracts have you submitted in the previous 5 years?

☐ 0

☐ 1-3

☐ 4+

Q8 How important is external grant or contract funding to your RSCA?

☐ Very important

☐ Somewhat important

☐ Not important

Q9 How confident are you with your ability to do the following?

	Very confident	Somewhat confident	Not at all confident
Seek out external funding sources	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Write a grant proposal	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Develop a grant budget	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Conduct research	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Administer a grant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q10 Do you find any of the following barriers to seeking external funding for your RSCA?

	Yes	No
Lack of time	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of grant writing experience	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of funding opportunities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of knowledge of potential funding opportunities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of equipment to conduct research	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of space to conduct research	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q11 Please describe any barriers encountered that were not mentioned in the previous question.

Q12 If offered, which of the following workshops would you attend?

- ☐ Grant writing
- ☐ Grant prospecting
- ☐ Working with specific funding agencies (i.e. NIH, NSF, ED)
- ☐ Writing and submitting an IRB protocol
- ☐ Writing and submitting an IACUC protocol
- ☐ Working with the Drone/UAS/UAV committee
- ☐ None
- ☐ Other _____

Q13 Would you find it helpful to receive monthly emails highlighting upcoming funding opportunities?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ No

End of Block: Your Overall Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activity (RSCA)

Start of Block: Demographics

Q14 How long have you been at Stan State?

- ☐ 0-5 years
- ☐ 6-10 years
- ☐ 11+ years
- ☐ Other _____

Q15 What is your role on campus?

- ☐ Tenured/Tenure track faculty
- ☐ Lecturer
- ☐ Staff/Administrator
- ☐ Other _____

Q16

What is your home College/Unit?

- ☐ College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences
- ☐ College of Business Administration
- ☐ College of Education, Kinesiology, and Social Work
- ☐ College of Science
- ☐ University Library
- ☐ Academic Affairs (Staff/Administrator)
- ☐ Student Affairs
- ☐ Business and Finance
- ☐ University Advancement
- ☐ Other _____

End of Block: Demographics

Appendix 2. ORSP Strategic Plan

2018/19 Strategic Plan

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs

Purpose of this Plan

This planning document is designed to outline actions/tasks to move us in our strategic direction. We view the document as binding as well as fluid. It is binding in that it is our way of articulating our commitment to what we want to accomplish; but it is fluid in that we treat it as a living document and revise it responsibly as circumstances require. We are committed to updating this document at least annually. A timeline has not been affixed to the actions listed, as we reference this document periodically in our weekly team meetings and identify deadlines through our ongoing team discussions.

Slogan

The Office of Research and Sponsored Programs (ORSP) is a ready resource for the campus community, providing support for success in research and sponsored projects.

Mission

The Office of Research and Sponsored Programs supports the campus community in three primary areas:

- extramural grant and contract proposal development and submission;
- research administration to facilitate compliance with regulations governing use of human subjects and animals, facilitate procedures related to intellectual property rights, and facilitate other aspects of research administration; and
- faculty-led student engagement in research, scholarship, and creative activities (SERSCA)

Vision

The Office of Research and Sponsored Programs aims to be a ready resource to the campus community, in collaboration with other University units, to provide the support necessary for research investigators and project directors to successfully conduct their RSCA pursuits by creating an environment of seamless transition and support from proposal application through account close-out for externally funded projects; promoting and supporting an environment of safe and compliant research; and creating an environment that increases opportunity for faculty to engage their students in RSCA in support of their academic and professional development.

Goals

In support of its mission and vision, ORSP has five goals.

1. Increase the University's grant and contract success in at least one of the following ways:
 - e. increase the number of grant and contract proposal submissions;
 - f. increase the number of dollars requested;
 - g. increase the rate of meritorious grant and contract proposals; and
 - h. increase the number of dollars awarded.
2. Increase the campus community's compliance with policies governing research (e.g., use of human subjects and animals, conflict of interest, intellectual property rights, and export controls).
3. Improve the experience of principal investigators and project directors in grants and contracts with seamless transition from pre-award to post-award.

4. Increase support and opportunities for faculty-led student engagement in research, scholarship, and creative activities (SERSCA).
5. Increase participation in and contribution to the professional fields related to the mission of the unit.

Strategic Actions

To accomplish its five goals, ORSP has strategic actions planned and are listed for each goal.

Goal 1. Increase the University's grant and contract success in at least one of the following ways:

- a. increase the number of grant and contract proposal submissions;**
 - b. increase the number of dollars requested;**
 - c. increase the rate of meritorious grant and contract proposals; and**
 - d. increase the number of dollars awarded.**
- Sustain the ORSP outreach campaign to increase awareness of opportunities, policies, and procedures.
 - Continue prospecting system development efforts and fully implement an effective and efficient prospecting system, including request intake and a communication plan for communicating opportunities to targeted groups as appropriate.
 - Continue to refine the internal workflow, work distribution system, and training within ORSP to most efficiently utilize members of the ORSP team, taking into consideration knowledge and expertise, personal interests, development opportunities, and the need for cross-training and business continuity.
 - Develop and implement grant development training modules that include components related to prospecting and proposal writing.
 - Maintain an open line of communication with Advancement when submitting proposals to private foundations.
 - Explore electronic research administration (ERA) systems to possibly adopt to manage and track the grant/contract proposal pipeline.

Goal 2. Increase the campus community's compliance with policies governing research (e.g., use of human subjects and animals, conflict of interest, intellectual property rights, and export controls).

- Sustain the ORSP outreach campaign to increase awareness of compliance issues including:
 - Continue UIRB workshop delivery.
 - Develop and deliver IACUC information workshop
 - Develop outreach and information materials supporting the UAS/UAV committee
- Provide administrative support and compliance guidance to the IRB, IACUC, UAS/UAV committees.
- Revise the IRB and IACUC campus policies to align with current federal regulations.
- Develop compliance resource materials for PIs to increase awareness and help ensure compliance of sponsored programs.
- Develop intellectual property training resources in compliance with the University's Intellectual Property Policy.

Goal 3. Improve the experience of principal investigators and project directors in grants and contracts with seamless transition from pre-award to post-award.

- Sustain the ORSP outreach campaign to increase awareness of opportunities, policies, and procedures.
- Continue working closely with Post Award to identify areas of shared priorities and initiatives that support seamless support throughout the lifecycle of a sponsored project.
- Identify specific joint initiatives, draft together a corresponding action plan for implementation, and carry through collaboratively.

Goal 4. Increase support and opportunities for faculty-led student engagement in research, scholarship, and creative activities (SERSCA).

- Sustain the ORSP outreach campaign to increase awareness among students and faculty about SERSCA Program opportunities and procedures.
- Develop and distribute a SERSCA Program flier to complement the already existing individual activity fliers.
- Continue to formalize the Student Research Competition: invite the President and Provost to attend and/or participate in the awards ceremony; invite ASI representatives to participate in the awards ceremony; and work with the Signal and University Communications early to promote and cover the event.
- Identify new funding sources for the SERSCA Program and submit applications.

Goal 5. Increase participation in and contribution to the professional fields related to the mission of the unit.

- Send each team member to at least one professional meeting.
- Apply to present the SERSCA Program (based on the peer-reviewed manuscript) at a national research administration professional meeting.
- Develop a manuscript from the self-study currently being conducted on developing and implementing an IACUP. Identify a target journal, and submit. Make plans for a professional meeting presentation for the following year.
- Aim for each team member to obtain/maintain Certified Research Administrator (CRA) designation by Research Administrators Certification Council (RACC).

Appendix 3. Biography

Joyce Bell is currently the Director of Research and Sponsored Programs at California State University, Stanislaus. She began her career in research administration at the University of Pennsylvania in 1993 in the Department of Psychiatry where she served as a departmental research and business administrator. Joyce earned her Bachelor's degree in Political Science from the University of Pennsylvania and maintains her status as a Certified Research Administrator.